FAITH AND HISTORY
IN THE THOUGHT OF H. RICHARD NIEBUHR

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William Russell Murry
Drew University
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PREFACE

There can be no question but that the central conviction of H. Richard Niebuhr's theology is the sovereignty of God. At the same time his thought was deeply affected by the modern consciousness of history as he noted in reflecting on his work two years before his death.

> When I write about the nature of faith I am made aware that I brought over into my reorientation of the '30's a kind of methodological conviction that had been formed in me long before whether in the school of the liberals or simply in modern existence as such: a conviction of the radically historical character of human existence. I am certain that I can only see, understand, think, believe, as a self that is in time. . . . [Faith] comes to me in history.[1]

It is the purpose of this dissertation to examine Niebuhr's understanding of "the radically historical character" of existence and its implications for his theology. Our concern is not simply with the challenge which historiographical method presents to theology, but with the meaning for Christian faith and its reflective arm of the whole new framework of understanding that has resulted from man's consciousness of history. The problem of the relationship between scientific historical inquiry and the history which faith speaks of, the question of the relationship of fact and meaning, is one of the cluster of issues which the modern concept of history raises for theology. It is one with which we shall be concerned but it is not the only issue nor is it necessarily the most important of the issues resulting from modern man's awareness of his historicity.

Our thesis is that Niebuhr was acutely aware of the depth of the revolution wrought by historical thinking and that his thought represents a sustained and consistent response to the need for a "resymbolization"[2] of the Christian faith that does justice both to historical understanding and to the Gospel.

In order to understand Niebuhr's thought and the issues posed by historical consciousness, I have traced briefly the rise of the modern interpretation of history and its impact on theology in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In this section (Part I) the thought of Ernst Troeltsch, which was deeply influential on Niebuhr, is seen as representing the culmination of the confrontation of faith and history. The method of beginning with the historical background also serves to identify the specific problems that Niebuhr inherited and to which he addressed himself. There is no attempt to trace the influences of other thinkers upon Niebuhr. In addition to Troeltsch, Niebuhr was particularly indebted to Barth, Schleiermacher, Edwards, and Kierkegaard among theologians, and Royce, Mead and Bergson among philosophers and social theorists. However, Niebuhr's theology shows the influence of many men, and to treat them all would require an intellectual history of the West. Yet his thought is not eclectic or imitative; it represents the thinking of a man who had absorbed the ideas of many others so deeply that he was able to use them creatively in the fashioning of a theology that is distinctively his own.

Part II, the body of the dissertation, deals with Niebuhr's theology as a whole with particular emphasis on the role of history in his methodological reflection. The method followed is descriptive and analytical and therefore interpretive.

Certain basic conceptions and implicit assumptions are introduced at the outset and then elaborated upon and their implications drawn subsequently. This makes for some repetitiousness, but it seemed essential in the light of the subtle interrelationship of all the major motifs in Niebuhr's thought. Some criticisms that have been leveled at Niebuhr are dealt with in the context of the discussion of the point under attack. The Conclusion attempts to bring together the major elements of Niebuhr's thinking in the light of the problems noted in Part I and in the form of a summary of his thought around motifs not developed as fully in the body of the work.

I have not attempted to trace the development of Niebuhr's thinking, although there are shifts in his approach or at least in his emphases. However, after his reorientation in the early 1930's his work seems to me to be a unified whole with each individual writing building on the previous works. I only hope that this vision is communicated to the reader as clearly as Niebuhr has communicated it to me.

[1] H. Richard Niebuhr, "Reformation: Continuing Imperative," The Christian Century, Vol. LXXVII, No. 9 (March 2, 1960), p. 249.

[2] Ibid., p. 251.

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KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

The first reference to each of the following works will include all the details of publication, but thereafter the abbreviations indicated will be used in citations.

Christ and Culture	*CC*
Faith and Ethics (ed. Paul Ramsey)	*FE*
The Kingdom of God in America	*KGA*
The Meaning of Revelation	*MR*
The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry	*PCM*
Radical Monotheism and Western Culture	*RMWC*
The Responsible Self	*RS*
"Reformation: Continuing Imperative," *Christian Century* article	*RCI*
The Social Sources of Denominationalism	*SSD*

PART I

THEOLOGY AND THE MODERN HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

CHAPTER I

THE RISE OF THE MODERN CONSCIOUSNESS OF HISTORY

Vico: The "Leap in Being"

In classical and medieval thought, history, viewed as belonging fundamentally to the realm of nature and characterized by mutability, was not considered to be the proper focus of the philosophical quest, which sought truth in the immutable, eternal order of Being. Reason and mystical apprehension were the paths to knowledge, for true knowledge (*episteme*) consisted of universal truths and not of particulars. Moreover, man's attention was directed to the cosmos as the realm of Being and truth. It was not until sometime in the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries that a "leap in being" (Eric Voegelin) occurred from cosmological to historical thinking. The herald of the new era was an obscure Italian appropriately named Giambattista Vico.

Trained as a Cartesian, Vico objected to the mathematical model of knowledge of Descartes on the grounds that the fact that an idea is clear and distinct does not prove its truth but only that I believe it to be true. Vico sought another "principle by which to distinguish what can be known from what cannot."[1] He found that principle in the notion that true knowledge, i.e., understanding as opposed to mere perception, is possible only of that which the knower himself has made. Thus, mathematics is real knowledge but only of mental constructs. Physics, the natural world, is truly knowable only to God, who made it. However,

> The world of civil society has certainly been made by men, and its principles are therefore to be found within the modification of our own human mind. Whoever reflects on this cannot but marvel that the philosophers should have bent all their energies to the study of the world of nature, which, since God made it, He alone knows; and that they should have neglected the study of the world of nations or civil world, which since men had made, men could hope to know.[2]

Thus, with Vico's new criterion of knowledge, the ancient distinction between doxa and episteme is reversed and the historical world acquires the status of episteme for man. This fundamental valuation, though modified and refined, remains basic to the modern human sciences (Geisteswissenschaften) and, particularly for our purposes, to modern theology.

Vico developed his philosophy of history into a conception of universal history characterized by a spiral movement in which the "three ages of history" ran their course and then a new cycle began. Unlike the ancient cyclical view of history, Vico's conception avoided the view of history as the recurrence of identical life-cycles, the theory of eternal recurrence. To Vico history combined the universal and the particular in such a way that the pattern of the three ages yielded not a recurrence of identical ages but of periods having some common distinguishing characteristics and some fundamental differences. Thus the Middle Ages was different from its Greek counterpart because of the effects of Christianity. History did not repeat itself exactly, for each cycle contained genuinely new factors. In this way Vico understood the historical process as the sphere in which something genuinely new could and did occur, and he understood that as a result human nature was not eternally constant but was to some degree a product of human history.[3]

> The nature of things is nothing but their coming into being at certain times and in certain fashions. Whenever the time and fashion is thus and so, such and not otherwise are the things that come into being.[4]

Despite the differences between human nature in the various ages and between the different cycles, Vico discerned a common human nature sufficient to serve as a basis for historical understanding.

> There must in the nature of human things be a mental language common to all nations, which uniformly grasps the substance of things feasible in human life, and expresses it with as many diverse modifications as these same things may have diverse aspects.[5]

It is that which all men share qua men that enables the historian to understand the past.

The study of the past was for Vico important in itself as well as for present knowledge. In opposition to the view of the Enlightenment, Vico saw the value of the distant ages, and appreciated these in their own terms. The past was not inferior; indeed, for Vico the ages of myth and religion, the "ages of the gods and of heroes," were superior to the age of reason. He did not take the myths of ancient people at face value but asked what they meant with respect to the character and outlook of the people. Thus Vico made the first important steps toward a modern scientific historical method by asking the question of meaning, the hermeneutical question.

Kant and the Demise of Traditional Metaphysics

Vico had seen that the Cartesian attempt to deduce the nature of reality from the presence of clear and distinct ideas in the mind could yield no valid material content. Deductive metaphysics received another blow, meanwhile, from British empiricism which denied the possibility of innate ideas and insisted that all knowledge comes through experience. Hume in particular placed a heavy burden of proof on "any future metaphysics" by maintaining that knowledge originates in impressions and ideas that are immediately present in experience. Similarly, by showing that causality, rather than inhering in the structure of reality, could be understood simply as a habit of man's mind acquired by his being accustomed to particular successions of occurrences, Hume undercut natural religion's arguments for the existence of God as "First Cause."

It was, of course, Kant who dealt the death blow to traditional deductive metaphysics in his critical philosophy. While the First Critique was intended to provide a philosophical foundation for natural science by showing that the organization of empirical data required certain prior conditions which were supplied by the mind, the rather unhistorical Kant thereby established a basis for historical knowledge in two ways. First and positively, by emphasizing the empirical as the basis of scientific knowledge, Kant opened the door for the empirical study of the human sciences. Secondly and negatively, by denying the possibility of a metaphysics based on the pure theoretical reason, critical idealism paved the way for the view that human understanding was best achieved through natural and historical inquiry. Of course, Kant himself was confident that the practical reason offered a secure foundation for the metaphysical "postulates" of God, freedom and immortality. Nevertheless, by drawing the limits of human knowledge as he did, Kant provided the negative grounds for the emergence of an increased interest in history and at the same time offered philosophical grounding for a scientific historical method.

The Romantic Revolution

Vico's thought remained relatively unknown until late in the eighteenth century when German thinkers who had arrived at a similar point of view rediscovered his work and valued it highly. Much of what was implicit in Vico's thinking became explicit in these men, particularly Herder, the Romantics, and Hegel.

The principal importance of Herder to historical consciousness was his recognition that human nature is characterized not by uniformity but by diversity. However, as Collingwood points out, his conception was not a genuinely historical one for he regarded human differences as due to natural or ethnic peculiarities,

> that is, as the inherited psychological characteristics of the varieties of the human species, . . . so that instead of the Enlightenment's conception of a single fixed human nature we now have the conception of several fixed human natures. Each of these is regarded not as an historical product but as a presupposition of history. There is still no conception of a people's character as having been made what it is by that people's historical experience; on the contrary, its historical experience is regarded as a mere result of its fixed character.[6]

Nevertheless, Herder had drawn attention to the different characteristics of men in different cultures and in different periods of history and had refused to attribute these differences simply to geographic and climatic conditions (as had, e.g., Montesquieu). He had also insisted that past epochs must be judged not on the basis of present criteria but in terms of their unique individuality.

It is generally acknowledged that the modern sense of history is one of the principal contributions of Romanticism. Whereas the Enlightenment had by and large depreciated the past as barbaric and unenlightened, Romanticism often idealized it. Rousseau's positive evaluation of primitive man (the "noble savage" exaggeration about which he later had second thoughts), Hölderlin's nostalgia for classical Greece, and Novalis' longing for the Middle Ages -- these expressed and symbolized the Romantics' sympathetic appreciation of history. Each age must be appreciated for its own intrinsic value and not seen as falling short of the goals of a particular historical expression of the human spirit, e.g., the Enlightenment. The Romantics' emphasis on the creative imagination and on the role of feeling and intuition enabled them to appreciate less "rational" periods of history.

Further, Romanticism insisted on the continuity of historical and cultural development and on the significance of past cultures for the unfolding of the potentialities of the human spirit. Thus it understood man primarily in the context of history rather than in terms of eternity; Romanticism's anthropology tended to be dynamic rather than static.

In his Confessions, as we have noted, Rousseau articulates something like the Pauline-Augustinian conception of the historicity of the self. In tracing his own history, Rousseau understands himself through the changes that occurred in his development. He announced at the beginning of that work: "I am not made like anyone I have ever met; I even venture to believe that I am not made like anyone now alive."[7]

Finally, in shaping an historical method, the Romantics brought to bear their conception of genuine knowledge as sympathetic understanding. That is, knowledge must be not merely external observation as is the knowledge of natural science; it must involve putting oneself into the object of knowledge in order to feel it imaginatively as one's own experience.[8]

In summary, to the method and consciousness of history Romanticism contributed:

1) a deep appreciation of the past for its own intrinsic merit and as a unique achievement of man;

2) an appreciation of the past as an ingredient in the present and hence as a necessary prerequisite to understanding the present;

3) the recognition of the dynamic, historical nature of the self as opposed to substantialist views of human nature; and,

4) the notion of historical method as re-experiencing past events by imaginative reconstruction.

The result of these factors was, first, an immense gain to historiography as witnessed by the rise especially in

Germany of modern scientific history, and second, what must surely be termed a revolution in conceptual thinking both in philosophy and theology. With Romanticism historical consciousness had come into its own although it remained for Hegel to give systematic expression to it in philosophy and for Schleiermacher to articulate it in theology.

Hegel: The Historicization of Being

For Hegel the fundamental problem of philosophy was to reconcile and unify all opposing elements: Being and Becoming, God and man, subject and object, essence and existence, particular and universal, thought and being, internal and external, classical and Hebraic-Christian cultures. His method for accomplishing this monumental task was, of course, the dialectic in which contradictions were overcome by the eternal process of simultaneously negating, preserving, and elevating (Aufhaben) each of the polar extremes into a higher unity. Hegel discerned this unusual logic at work in history and in particular in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity which is paradigmatic for his philosophical method.

Ontology. Christianity had revealed the structure of existence and of thought in its Trinitarian understanding (as Hegel interpreted it) that God who as pure Being was indeterminate and undifferentiated essence became determinate by "emptying" himself or externalizing himself in existence as a man. God the Father becomes objectified and concrete in God the Son; but that otherness is cancelled yet preserved in the

Holy Spirit, which is the higher unity of essence and existence. Traditional philosophy had conceived of Being as static substance (and was thus basically cosmologically oriented), but Hegel insists that being must be apprehended as _subject_,[9] i.e., as dynamic, self-creating reality, and therefore as _Geist_.[10] _Geistige_ reality, then, creates itself or realizes its inherent possibilities only by this threefold productive process of expressing itself in concrete existence and then reclaiming its expression as its own. The Trinity thus represents the truth about the nature and structure of reality.

Man, as _geistige_ reality, is a subjective being (being "in-itself") who becomes determinate by creating an objective historical world (being "for-itself", what Hegel also calls _Objektiv Geist_). Only as he re-integrates his alienated objective expressions into himself does he achieve wholeness and self-fulfilment. In re-claiming the products of his creation as his own he attains self-consciousness and freedom. The reconciliation of subject and object is the function of art, religion and philosophy, the three forms of "Absolute _Geist_."

In this way Hegel insisted that the content of Christianity was retained in philosophy, although the form was different. The form of religious belief was pictorial representation (_Vorstellung_), whereas that of philosophy was conceptualization (_Begriff_). Pictorially represented, the ultimate structure of reality is projected outside of (_vor-stellen_: placed before) man and history. The religious imagination objectifies or reifies whereas conceptual thought unites the subject with its object. Christianity pictures God as a separately existing Being over against man; philosophy understands God as geistige Being itself, and man as the highest creative expression of God is the means by which the Absolute Geist attains actuality and self-consciousness. "The divine nature itself is but this: to be the Absolute Geist, that is to say, to be the unity of the divine and human nature."[11] Human history is the realm of Spirit's coming to self-consciousness as Spirit.

For Hegel, then, God is pure act or pure freedom; formally, God is the dialectical process itself. "God is this: to distinguish oneself from oneself, to be object to oneself, but to be completely identical with oneself in this distinction."[12] Materially, God or Absolute Spirit is history understood in its twofold character as both actual history and history as thought, the history of philosophy.

Emil Fackenheim has pointed out that the minority tradition in Western metaphysics which Hegel represents, along with Boehme, Schelling, Berdyaev and possibly Erigena, is a meontological tradition. In the majority Western philosophic tradition, God is Pure Being whereas in the meontological tradition God is Pure Freedom who in creating Himself ex nihilo passes from nothing into something.[13]

The movement of self-making is circular inasmuch as the beginning of the process must contain implicitly the possibilities that are actualized throughout the process. But the process is a real process and a real self-constituting which, in moving forward, integrates and re-integrates its own past into the forward movement.

"Only a self-constituting process can be in its ontological constitution historical,"[14] but it is not necessarily historical. The meontological God is quasi-historical because it is eternal or wholly present. Yet it is quasi-historical insofar as something really happens.[15] Its end is and yet is not identical with its beginning. Being realizes itself as self-conscious Spirit in time. "The process of carrying forward this form of knowledge of itself is the task which spirit accomplishes as actual History."[16] Man is the instrument of Spirit's coming to itself. Man's activity truly creates new realities and thus creates reality itself.

However, when man has realized a world that conforms to his potentialities, when his essence is actualized in existence, history comes to an end. Spirit comes to itself via the tension between the self and the world, but when this tension is overcome, history (human activity born of desire) ends. Time is no longer future, but present, and hence is not time but eternity, i.e., the "eternal now" of thought. What disappears in the past is preserved in the present in the form of Science or philosophy, the concept as pure thought.[17] History is not a dead past, but a living present, a present that lives in thought, which is to say, eternity.

Spirit's self-consciousness is its consciousness of all that it has ever been and thought, not as alien objects, but as its own. It is aware of itself in immediacy, but this is not "pure" immediacy; it is mediated immediacy, history having been the mediator.

Epistemology. Because history is the realm in which Spirit accomplishes its goal of self-realization, philosophy or conceptual knowledge of the Spirit is historical knowledge. Hegel's philosophy is a hermeneutical undertaking, an interpretation of the meaning of history. History understood as mere occurrences, what is sometimes called the "facts" of history, is not itself real knowledge. Bare historical events are merely accidental and arbitrary and "concern particular existence"[18] and as such cannot constitute philosophy. But they do constitute the basis for knowledge, for philosophy comprehends these same contingent events in terms of their human meaning which is to say in terms of their development of the Spirit. Philosophy is history understood conceptually, and as such it presupposes actual history. "The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk."[19] The history of philosophy is the reflective side of actual or existential history. History, which exists on the level of consciousness, comes to self-consciousness in philosophy.

> Philosophy . . . considers not the inessential determination but the determination insofar as it is essential. Not the abstract or unactual is its element and contents but the actual, that which posits itself and lives in itself, existence in its Concept.[20]

Will Herberg has suggested that "Geist" might be translated "man and his works."[21] That translation is appropriate for Hegel's meaning since it recognizes the relatedness of internal thought and external expression, of reason and history.

In the Phenomenology of Mind the modes or forms of consciousness appear simultaneously as concrete historical realities. As Herbert Marcuse writes:

> The constant transition from philosophical to historical analysis -- which has often been criticized as a confusion, or an arbitrary metaphysical interpretation of history -- is intended to verify and demonstrate the historical character of the basic philosophical concepts. All of them comprehend and retain actual historical stages in the development of mankind. Each form of consciousness that appears in the immanent progress of knowledge crystallizes as the life of a given historical epoch.[22]

Philosophy is inseparable from history. Mathematical truths, on the other hand, bear no intrinsic relationship to their objects. The truth of mathematical objects exists outside of themselves, in the subject. They are abstract, lifeless, disembodied.[23] Philosophy, however, can only know as true what has come to pass. Absolute knowledge is possible for Hegel only because man in his history had created a world in which he had attained freedom. All previous historical epochs and all previous philosophical expressions have contributed to the total life of the Spirit as "moments" of the process, and as such they are dialectically annulled but retained in the whole.

Formally, the logic of history and of thought is the dialectic. The dialectic is not an a priori deduction but an inference from the nature of man and history. Through the dialectical process, inadequate forms of existence and of thought are continuously negated without being lost entirely; each present is built on the remains of the past. Each historical expression represents a degree of truth which must be retained and refined to produce more adequate forms. No epoch and no expression of knowledge exists de novo; each learns from the past. Historical knowledge is essential to the emergence of higher forms of the Spirit.

Reason itself is what history in its dialectical unfolding has made it. It is not an a priori "natural" reason or "eternal" reason; it is historical reason. Thus Hegel could write in the famous passage in the "Preface" to the Philosophy of Right: "What is rational is actual and what is actual is rational."[24] That is why Hegel's reason contains "irrational" elements, for history includes the passional.

The dialectic thus opposes all attempts to absolutize any one historical or philosophical expression, and therefore articulates the relativity of each "moment." "The truth is the whole." Hegel's solution to the problem of relativity is the understanding that each historical moment is a relative embodiment of the absolute; each moment is a part which participates in the totality and without which the Absolute would not be complete. Each moment is a relative expression, but it is a relative expression of the Absolute.

Theological Implications. We may now summarize Hegel's significance for the rise of historical consciousness and note some of the implications of his thought for the theological problem of history.

First, Hegel has provided an ontological grounding to history. History is not an unreal or insignificant realm, for it is the real activity of "being revealing itself to itself by an empirically existing discourse."[25] The Spirit is nothing other than all that has been in time. Hegel has given at least one kind of philosophical foundation to the Judeo-Christian affirmation that history is the sphere of divine activity. For Hegel the whole of history is the history of salvation, *Heilsgeschichte*.

Secondly, by understanding each moment as a necessary aspect or part of the whole, an essential stage on the road to the Spirit's fulfilment, Hegel both raised the question of the relative character of each historical "moment" and presented his own solution to the problem of relativity. For theology the question of the absolute validity of one moment of history became a serious problem, one which exercised a central role in the thought of Ernst Troeltsch and of H. Richard Niebuhr.

With respect to the question of the nature of historical knowledge, Hegel had achieved a synthesis between the Greek conception of knowledge as universals and the Hebraic conception of knowledge as particulars. The particular truths of history were in themselves (i.e., *qua* particulars) unimportant. Yet these same truths provided the basis for conceptual knowledge (universals). Individuals and individual events must, in the final analysis, be dialectically replaced by the Concept. Thus F.C. Baur could criticize Hegel's interpretation of the Incarnation because it was not treated as something that happened once but rather became universalized as the essence of God eternally.[26] But the universal for Hegel was unthinkable apart from the particular event of history which gave rise to it. There is no truth apart from historical knowledge. For theology, despite the serious questions raised by Baur and others, this could at least mean that revelation, like all knowledge, was grounded in historical objectivity. Insofar as "everything which exists for consciousness is objective to it . . . there is an objectivity of revelation. Everything must come to us in an outward way."[27] Not the eternal truths of reason but an historical revelation was the proper subject matter of theology. The question then became the problem of the relationship between the particular truths of history and eternal truth, or it could also be stated as the problem of the relation between the "Jesus of history" and the "Christ of faith."

Stated otherwise, Hegel had conceived of history not as mere event or occurrence but as the history of thought. It was not enough simply to recount what happened; one had to understand the meaning of events. To use Collingwood's terminology, which was also Hegel's,[28] history had both an "inside" and an "outside," and merely to narrate the "outside" of events was not to understand history. This distinction between "fact" and "meaning" could lead to theological problems when the validity of the traditional correlation between the "actual Jesus" and the early Christian interpretation of him as recorded in the New Testament was challenged.

By conceiving history as, in the final analysis, the history of thought, Hegel adhered to a basically "presentist" position with respect to the problem of the locus of the past. That is, the past, which by definition has ceased to be, exists now through recollection. In the words of Croce's famous dictum: "All history is contemporary history." As Hegel saw it, actual history is now dissolved into thought. Thus the theological problem of how we can speak of a no-longer-existing historical person exercising decisive influence on men in the present is answered by this position in the understanding that the past is an integral part of the present and is retained as memory. That the meaning of the original event may have been dialectically modified during the course of history is no problem, but on the contrary is the modus vivendi of historical understanding.

As we have seen, Hegel understands man not as static substance in the manner of most of the Western tradition from Greek to Enlightenment thought, but as dynamic activity in the manner of Hebraic thought. Actually Hegel's anthropology is a synthesis of the two views, for man is what he becomes (Hebraic) but what he becomes is what was implicit or potential from the outset. But the emphasis seems to lie in the understanding that, generically, man is a self-constituting subject whose essence is the result of his existence in history.

In spite of Hegel's historicization of man and of knowledge, he finally leaves history behind in favor of the eternity of pure thought. Man is a composite of finite and infinite, nature and spirit, but it is the infinite spirit in him that prevails. Nevertheless, as Kojève has justly said, "the introduction of history into philosophy is Hegel's principal and decisive discovery."[29] In so doing Hegel illustrated one of his own axioms about history: "It is of the nature of truth to prevail when its time has come, and truth appears only when its time has come."[30] In Hegel's work, the consciousness of history entered thoroughly into the modern mind.

NOTES

[1] R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), p.64.

[2] Giambattista Vico, *The New Science*, trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1948), p.85.

[3] Augustine is the first to articulate this view in extra-Biblical literature in the *Confessions*. Rousseau rediscovers it in the work of his by the same title. Vico did not develop the full implications of man's historicity, but he laid the necessary foundation for it.

[4] Vico, p.58.

[5] *Ibid*., p.60

[6] Collingwood, p.91.

[7] Quoted by Howard E. Hugo, "Introduction," *The Portable Romantic Reader* (New York: The Viking Press, 1957), pp.2-3.

[8] Cf. Collingwood's discussion of Schiller (*The Idea of* History, pp. 104-105).

[9] Cf. "Preface," *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. Walter Kaufmann in Walter Kaufmann, *Hegel* (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., 1965), p. 388.

[10] Walter Kaufmann has pointed out that Hegel identifies *Geist* with *spiritus*, *pneuma* and *ruach*, not with *nous* or *logos*. Geist then has the connotation of breath and wind and hence of living, moving, creative force. Hegel's conception of *Geist* was derived from the *Heilige Geist*. (Cf. Kaufmann, *Nietzsche* [Meridian Books; Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1956], p.385, and Kaufmann, *Hegel*, p.276.)

Ontologically, a "subject" is that which creates itself (makes itself what it is) by the process of acting in its world and upon its world, the process of "positing" itself in objective existence. It then re-integrates these objective expressions into itself and in so doing re-makes itself, develops itself, or realizes its potentiality in actuality. Insofar as it fails to re-integrate its objective expression, the subject is alienated from (other than) its object, and fails to realize itself in its wholeness. Logically, a subject is not stable and passive but "passes into" and is qualified by its predicates. The predicate belongs to the subject as that which gives it determinate properties.

[11] G. W. F. Hegel, Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion, ed. G. Lasson (Philosophische Bibliothek, Vols. 59-63), III, 38, quoted by Karl Barth, Protestant Thought: From Rousseau to Ritschl, trans. Brian Cozens (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), p.302.

[12] Ibid., III, 6, quoted by Barth, p.302.

[13] Fackenheim, Metaphysics and Historicity (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1961), pp. 29-30. He also notes that in meontological metaphysics God is a process which (a) proceeds from sheer possibility into actuality, that is, God is pure making; (b) proceeds into otherness, cancels it and in so doing establishes itself, that is, God is self-making; and (c) because it is absolute self-making, it actualizes ex nihilo the totality of possibilities. (Ibid., pp. 31-32.)

[14] Ibid., p.34.

[15] Cf. Ibid., pp. 35ff.

[16] G. W. F. Hegel, The Phenomenology of Mind, trans. J. B. Baillie (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1910), p.801.

[17] "Time is the concept definitely existent, and presented to consciousness in the form of an empty intuition. Spirit necessarily appears in time, and it appears in time so long as it does not grasp its pure concept, i.e., so long as it does not annul time. Time is the pure self in external form, apprehended in intuition, and not grasped and understood by the self, it is the concept apprehended only through intuition. When this concept grasps itself, it supersedes its time character, (conceptually) comprehends intuition, and is intuition comprehended and comprehending. Time therefore appears as spirit's destiny and necessity, where spirit is not yet complete within itself." Ibid., p. 800.

[18] Hegel, "Preface," The Phenomenology of Mind, trans. Kaufmann, p. 416.

[19] G. W. F. Hegel, Philosophy of Right, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1942), p. 13.

[20] Hegel, "Preface," The Phenomenology of Mind, trans. Kaufmann, p. 424.

[21] Class lecture notes.

[22] Reason and Revolution (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), p. 95.

[23] Cf. Hegel, "Preface," The Phenomenology of Mind, trans. Kaufmann, pp. 416ff.

[24] P. 10.

[25] Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction À La Lecture de Hegel: Leçons sur La Phénoménologie de l'Esprit, Professées de 1933 à 1939*, reunies et publiées par Raymond Queneau (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), p. 365. Translation mine.

[26] Cf. Michael D. Ryan, "The Role of the Discipline of History in the Theological Interpretation of Albrecht Ritschl" (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Drew University, 1967), p. 149, citing Baur, *Die Christliche Gnosis*, p. 715.

[27] Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, III, 19, quoted by Barth, p. 303.

[28] Cf., e.g., *The Phenomenology of Mind*, p. 303.

[29] P. 438.

[30] Hegel, "Preface," *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. Kaufmann, p. 456.

CHAPTER II

THEOLOGY AND THE PROBLEM OF HISTORY

Schleiermacher: The Theological Foundation

Karl Barth has written that "the two motifs" of Schleiermacher's theology "are experience and history."[1] The motif of "experience" requires little comment since it is generally associated with the theology of Schleiermacher. Formally, religious experience takes the form of "feeling, or of immediate self-consciousness."[2] That is, the seat of religious consciousness is that inner unity of the self that exists prior to any differentiation between subject and object and hence prior to both knowing and doing, although it affects both of these.[3] The material element of the religious self-consciousness is "the consciousness of being absolutely dependent, or which is the same thing, of being in relation with God."[4] That is to say, given with (not derived or deduced from) the sense of the unity of the self in feeling is the awareness of the self as totally dependent; that which corresponds to this sense is what we term God. "The *Whence* of our receptive and active existence . . . is to be designated by the word 'God,' and this is for us the really original signification of that word."[5]

God, then, is present to consciousness *in the form of* my immediate awareness of being absolutely dependent. God is present to consciousness, but this presence is inseparable from the awareness of oneself as standing in this relationship. Man does not experience God as an object, since the awareness of absolute dependence is prior to the subject-object differentiation of the sensible self-consciousness. This should not be taken to mean that God is an inference from my consciousness of absolute dependence. That would be to make God a logical deduction from my experience, and Kant had undercut that procedure. For Schleiermacher, God is given to consciousness but not in the form of knowledge. Knowledge belongs to the sensible self-consciousness where subject and object are distinguished, and the idea of God, "which is nothing more than the expression of the feeling of absolute dependence, is the most direct reflection upon it and the most original idea with which we are here concerned."[6]

Religion or the relationship to God is not a matter of knowledge but of "immediate experience." Theology is reflection upon the religious experience. Therefore, theology deals not with God as He is in Himself but with God in relation to man. God and faith belong together.

Faith and History. Lest the religious self-consciousness be interpreted in a rationalistic sense or a mystical way, Schleiermacher takes pains to point out that the consciousness of God never occurs apart from the presence of the sensible self-consciousness. The sensible self-consciousness is that which is related to the natural and historical world. The religious self-consciousness stands in reciprocal relation to the sensible, and without this relation to the sensible self-consciousness the religious self-consciousness could not come into being at all or at least it would be unformed, undifferentiated. The whole self is present in every moment of life, whether it is conscious of it or not, and, although for purposes of analysis, the higher self-consciousness may be conceived apart from the sensible and hence not subject to the antitheses that characterize the sensible, it never actually appears that way because man is a temporal, historical being, and all that he is and feels is involved in the antitheses of temporal and historical consciousness. "For it is as a person determined for this moment in a particular manner within the realm of the antithesis that he is conscious of his absolute dependence."[7]

The implications of this reciprocity of the two levels of self-consciousness are many, but for our purposes here we may confine our remarks to the implications for the question of history. In the first place, although the feeling of absolute dependence is presupposed in all modifications of the religious self-consciousness, it is not a basis for natural religion. Both in the *Reden*[8] and in the *Glaubenslehre*, Schleiermacher insists that there is no such thing as natural religion; there are only "positive" or historical religions. The feeling of absolute dependence does not exist by itself, independently, but is rather a "tendency"[9] or a capacity (*Anlage*) inherent in the constitution of man but never existing in pure form. Its content is always historically mediated. "This God-consciousness, as it is here described, does not constitute by itself alone an actual moment in religious experience, but always in connexion with other particular determinations."[10]

Although in both the Reden and the Glaubenslehre Schleiermacher begins with the essence of religion as a proposition "borrowed from ethics," it is arguable that in fact he began with what he found in the religious consciousness of "positive" religions and by phenomenological analysis was able to abstract the general essence of religion as a universal characteristic of man presupposed in all particular religions. In the Kurze Darstellung, ethics is defined as "the science of the principles of history,"[11] which would indicate that it deals with universal truths derived from the particulars of historical existence. Stated theologically, the possibility for God-consciousness is man's original perfection which has been corrupted by sin and is therefore incapacitated and dependent upon another to be called forth.

Furthermore, the reciprocal relationship of the two levels of consciousness is basic to the possibility of communication which means in turn that it is fundamental to historical religion. Without the interrelatedness of the sensible and higher self-consciousness, language, which belongs to the former, would have no bearing on the God-consciousness. Historical religion would not be a possibility, and man would be left in a state of "God-forgetfulness." In stressing the reciprocity of the sensible and higher self-consciousness, Schleiermacher was concerned to lay a philosophical basis for a historical and realistic understanding of the nature of man and of religion.

The self is characterized by the circular movement of receptivity and activity or expression. The inner life is formed in its relationships with the outer world of other selves and in turn is expressed outwardly. Man's nature and destiny are tied inextricably to that of his fellow human beings. He is a self by virtue of the relational character of his existence; man is a social animal. His life is life in a community of other selves. "Now the fellowship without which there can for us be no living and vigorous piety is conditioned by these external expressions; . . . the 'inner' is known and grasped along with and by means of the 'outer.'"[12]

Expressibility, then, is central to Schleiermacher's conception of the nature of man and of religion. It is language which constitutes history and which confers a particular determination of life upon men. The "God-consciousness" is both elicited by and developed through language. "As regards the feeling of absolute dependence in particular, everyone will know that it was first awakened in him in the same way, by the communicative and stimulative power of expression or utterance."[13] Similarly, sin or the vitiation of the God-consciousness is historically communicated through language.[14]

Christianity presupposes that human consciousness has reached the level of a highly developed language. The specific quality of the Christian religious consciousness has its historical origin in Jesus and is mediated historically by means of language.

> The whole work of the Redeemer Himself was conditioned by the communicability of His self-consciousness by means of speech, and similarly Christianity has always and everywhere spread itself solely by preaching.[15]

Likewise, the preaching of Jesus, his words, are "the single most important or typical form of his work and his work was to communicate himself."[16]

It is clear, then, that for Schleiermacher human existence and human religious experience are historically implicated. The universal is known only in and through the particulars of historical life. Man is never found as universal man, which is rather an abstraction from particular historical men. Faith (_fides qua creditur_ -- the God-consciousness or feeling of absolute dependence) originates in an historical person and is mediated by an historical community.

One of the problems theology is confronted with by the historical consciousness is the question of how the past, which is no longer, can be said to be present and how it can influence the present decisively. Specifically how can theology claim that Jesus Christ, who is no longer "in the flesh," can have an effect on men in the present? Schleiermacher's answer is: through speech. The presence of Jesus Christ is mediated by language, and the effects of this presence are identical with those of his bodily presence.

> The impression which all later believers received in this way from the influence of Christ, i.e., from the common Spirit communicated by Him and from the whole communion of Christians, supported by the historical representation of His life and character, was just the same impression which His contemporaries received from Him directly.[17]

Perhaps it is not too much to say that for Schleiermacher language is presentational: it is the medium of Christ's presence; and it is performatory: it effects redemption.

Theology and History. Dogmatic theology is reflection upon the Christian religious experience as it has been mediated historically and as it is present in the Church. Its task is to interpret present experience in the light of the Church's historical expressions. Theology, then, is a "descriptive-historical discipline."[18] It is descriptive of the Christian experience as known through historical sources and in the present historical community. As present interpretation it is also the ground for the future development of doctrine.

Because it is the "doctrine of faith," theology cannot claim to deal with God as He is in Himself but only as he is known in relation to man.[19] Here as elsewhere Schleiermacher is being faithful to the Reformation, while respecting the Kantian epistemological limitations. The fact that we can only speak of God in terms of his effects upon us is not due to a "sub-human ignorance about God but the essence of human boundedness with reference to him."[20] Theological statements then are historical in another sense; they are affirmations about human (historical) existence and not about cosmology or metaphysics.

Conclusion. Earlier we noted Barth's statement that experience and history represent the two motifs of Schleiermacher's theology. Barth himself concludes that Schleiermacher resolves the polarity in favor of the former. Our assessment is rather that Schleiermacher has succeeded in moving dialectically between these poles in such a way that the content of theology is historical experience. Faith itself -- the consciousness of absolute dependence -- is historical in the sense that it originates in an historical person and is mediated by an historical community through language. Further, theology is an historical enterprise in that it is a phenomenological investigation of what is posited in history.

The history of which Schleiermacher speaks is not, as for Hegel, Weltgeschichte, but a specific history, a Heilsgeschichte, as it were. Nevertheless, Schleiermacher does not see it as qualitatively different from the rest of history. History is simply "people's life in common,"[21] and the history which theology investigates is "part of the modern study of history."[22] It is subject to ordinary historiographical methods in the same way that the Bible requires no special hermeneutical method. However, for the dogmatic theologian, the mode of relationship to Christian history is not that of a spectator but of a participant. He must be subjectively involved in his task because one who deals with Christian faith "without personal conviction"[23] cannot perceive its essential meaning for human life.

However, several problems implicit in Schleiermacher's understanding of the relationship of faith and history were to contribute to the subsequent collision between faith and historical science. On the one hand, Schleiermacher understood redemption to be effected by the life and teaching of Jesus Christ as these were remembered by the Church. The work of the Redeemer of eliciting the consciousness of God in others was dependent on his ability to express his own God-consciousness, as we have seen. If, however, serious questions were raised about the authenticity of the record of Jesus' life and teaching, his work as Redeemer became problematic. Moreover, if on historical grounds Jesus' consciousness of his Messiahship were to become questionable, it would throw some doubt on his uniqueness as well as on his work as Redeemer. Further, Schleiermacher based the affirmation of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ on the perfection of his God-consciousness. But this implied that he was simply perfect man and efforts to affirm his divinity were somewhat strained as a result. However, if Jesus was "man raised to the highest power" theology could claim no special access to his life nor could this historical event be exempt from the relativities of history. Schleiermacher's Christology made claims regarding the absoluteness of Christianity somewhat problematic.

Finally, his understanding of faith as inner experience tended to suggest, despite Schleiermacher's insistence to the contrary, that faith was not really related to historical processes. The balance between faith and history, between subjective and objective, which Schleiermacher had achieved proved to be a delicate one.

The Problem of Historical Knowledge

Schleiermacher's understanding of Christianity as an historically mediated religion presupposed that the New Testament accounts were trustworthy. He did not have to cope with the radical questioning of the reliability of the text that occurred after his death.

The historian Leopold Ranke, a colleague of Schleiermacher, seemed to express the Zeitgeist of the era following that great theologian. Ranke viewed the task of historiography as that of describing the past as it really happened (wie es eigentlich gewesen).[24] The task of the historian was to relate the facts, not to judge or moralize or interpret. This historiographical ideal implied that one could distinguish between fact and interpretation and further that all interpretive statements were of the same order. A further implication of this view was that it patterned historical studies after the natural sciences, operating on the basis of an active subject (the historian) investigating an inert and lifeless object (the historical evidence).

As far as theology was concerned, this positivistic conception of history was usually taken to mean that the task of Biblical studies was to get behind the New Testament interpretations of Jesus to the real, historical Jesus, the man "as he really was." The positivistic conception of history was influential among theologians in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, although the task of reconstructing the life of the historical Jesus was not always considered to be significant.

The major challenge to the Rankean conception of historical knowledge came later in the century from a group of Neo-Kantians, among them Wilhelm Dilthey for whom the aim of historical study was not so much unembellished fact but understanding (Verstehen). "We explain nature; we understand the life of the soul."[25]

Dilthey's methodological starting point is the distinction between the natural sciences and the human studies (Geisteswissenschaften). The task of the former is to abstract from repeated experience and establish general laws. Man must put himself out of the picture; his own personal lived experience (Erlebnis) should not enter into his scientific work. The human studies, however, cannot abstract phenomena from their historical and human context, for this is what gives them meaning and renders them understandable. The Geisteswissenschaften are concerned with uniquely human events which can only be known in their particularity.

Dilthey followed Vico's notion that man can truly understand only what he himself made. Historical understanding is a matter of penetration from within; it means re-living or re-experiencing (nacherleben) the life of others. This is possible because man's present lived experience is structurally like that of men of all time, and because it has been formed by the past. Understanding is "the rediscovery of the I in the Thou."[26] It is a fundamentally different mode of knowing than scientific knowledge, involving a different structure and a different relationship between knower and known. The subject-object relationship of the natural sciences does not obtain in historical understanding where the subject is involved as a total person in the lives and experiences of other subjects. Historical understanding cuts through the subject-object polarity. "We explain by means of purely intellectual processes, but we understand by means of the combined activity of all the mental powers in apprehension."[27] It is clear that historical knowing cannot be purely "objective" since the subject is involved in the "object" and the "object" is subjective existence (as it has objectified itself in historical evidence).

Dilthey's primary concern in history was human meaning rather than impersonal fact. His conception of historical knowing is more congenial to the interests of theology. However, even Dilthey's methodology though helpful to Biblical-historical work is limited in its usefulness for theology. For the theologian's task in the understanding of the relationship of faith and history is somewhat different from that of the historian or the philosopher of history. The theologian must not only concern himself with questions regarding the nature and reliability of the historical evidence and the problem of understanding events in their human meaning. These questions are important, but they are only the beginning. The theologian must ask not simply whether any event is unique and individual, but how one event is decisive; he must ask not simply how the past can be reconstructed in the present, but how one event in the past can be determinative in the present; he must ask not simply how to understand the human meaning of events, but how it is possible to speak of God acting in history.

These problems of historical knowledge first presented themselves to theology in the form of the quest for the historical Jesus which arose in the context of a fundamentally Rankean conception of history.

The Historical Jesus Question

One of the factors which gave impetus to the "quest for the historical Jesus" was Schleiermacher's Christocentric emphasis on the God-consciousness of Jesus as the historical basis of the faith of the Christian community. Another factor was the gradual development of critical historical methods of research. But the original impetus had come from the desire of the Deist Samuel Reimarus and the Hegelian D. F. Strauss to discredit the dogmatic structure which theology had built around the person of Jesus.[28] The quest has been amply documented by Schweitzer, and here we only wish to focus on those aspects of it which raised specific issues for theology.

As Schweitzer has suggested Reimarus was the first to begin to think historically about Jesus.[29] Although many of the conclusions of Reimarus have since proved to be largely erroneous, his work was rooted in the premise that the New Testament must be interpreted in the context of its time. Jesus' teachings must be understood as conditioned by and reflecting his social and historical milieu. His teaching about the kingdom must be understood "according to Jewish ways of thought,"[30] and therefore "the world of thought in which Jesus moved was essentially eschatological."[31]

Moreover, Reimarus recognized that an interpolative element was at work in the tradition, for only in this way could he account for certain problems in the text and for Christological dogmas that could not have come directly out of Jesus' teaching. He saw primitive Christianity as in part "a new creation, . . . which added something to (Jesus') preaching which it did not previously contain."[32]

Although his work had little influence on theology, Reimarus had posed two fundamental historical problems which theology had sooner or later to reckon with. The first of these was the issue of relativism, which asserted that the expressions of any era are conditioned by and relative to the thought forms, ideas and symbols common to that age. Reimarus also raised the question of the discrepancy between Jesus' teaching and that of the early church, subsequently termed the problem of the relationship between the Jesus of history and the Christ of the kerygma.

It remained for Strauss' Leben Jesu to pose these problems even more dramatically. It is important to note that Reimarus and Strauss and the responsible scholars of the life of Jesus movement as a whole presupposed for the first time that the Gospels were to be treated as any other historical documents and were therefore subject to scrutiny by the critical-historical method insofar as it was developed at the time. One purpose of Strauss in his Life "was to apply what he regarded as the canons of scientific historical research to the New Testament in order to separate fact from fiction, legend and myth."[33] Strauss' simple historical recognition that the people of first century Palestine lived in a thought world inhabited by mythological beings and supernatural powers led him to see that events were interpreted in mythological terms. He also saw myth-making capacities at work shaping the actual historical tradition to bring it into conformity with Messianic traditions. Even the synoptics yielded a host of mythical elements which had been imposed on the actual historical substructure in order to depict Jesus in terms of the Old Testament pattern.

Strauss discredited the Gospels as objective historical accounts and saw them as mythopoetic interpretations with the Fourth Gospel the most pronounced in this respect. In this way the distance between past and present was sharpened, as was the discrepancy between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith.

The first consequence of this basic critical work on the New Testament was the realization that the oral traditions about Jesus consisted of various unordered sayings and parables which the earliest gospel writers had collected, arranged and interpreted in such a way as to provide a coherent and meaningful narrative. In short, the Gospels "could not be considered a fully trustworthy source for a chronological picture of Jesus' ministry or for an insight into his personality,"[34] but only a reflection of the beliefs of the early church.

The application of historical critical methods to the New Testament led to a second major set of problems revolving around the question: in what sense is faith dependent upon the results of historical research? This question raised the further problems of the nature of history, the character of historical knowing, and the method appropriate to these conceptions.

Prior to the rise of historical criticism, it had been taken for granted that the New Testament picture of Jesus corresponded to the man himself. With the advent of historical criticism, this simple correlation between faith and history was shattered; it seemed that to choose faith was to reject history. This is, however, only one of several alternatives open to theology. We shall discuss four kinds of theological response to the problem of historical knowledge.

The Idealist Solution

One possible response to the disjunction between faith and the results of historical research was a combination of historical skepticism and a form of philosophical idealism. In one version this point of view regards the results of nineteenth century critical work as showing finally the impossibility of recovering Jesus' life and teaching as they really were, but says that nevertheless the idea for which Jesus was the historical occasion is now present and alive in men. It does not matter whether the idea received perfect phenomenal embodiment or expression in actual history; what matters "is that the idea is now alive in the common consciousness."[35] Strauss, for whom the idea of Jesus meant the conception of the unity of man and God, is one representative of this view.

Schweitzer represents another version of this position. While not denying the possibility of valid historical knowledge about Jesus, Schweitzer maintains that

> it is not Jesus as historically known, but Jesus as spiritually arisen within men, who is significant for our time . . .
>
> It is not given to history to disengage that which is abiding and eternal in the being of Jesus from the historical forms in which it worked itself out, and to introduce it into our world as a living influence. . . The abiding and eternal in Jesus is absolutely independent of historical knowledge and can only be understood by contact with His spirit which is still at work in the world. In proportion as we have the Spirit of Jesus we have the true knowledge of Jesus.[36]

Whether in the mysticism of Schweitzer or the Idealism of Strauss this general position accepts a radical disjunction between faith and history by regarding the truths of history as merely accidental occasions for the awareness of eternal truth. In this position history refers to facticity, and historical method is defined as a disinterested account of what really happened.

The Historic Christ of Faith

A second general response to the problem of the relationship between faith and history accepts the importance of history more broadly understood as Geschichte, but denies the theological relevance of the historical Jesus. This view maintains a somewhat different understanding of the "historical" and again includes several slightly divergent viewpoints.

Martin Kaehler. The classic formulation of this position is articulated by Martin Kaehler in The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ.[37] Kaehler rejected the life of Jesus movement on both historiographical and theological grounds. Historiographically, he maintained that the Gospels, the only sources of Jesus' life, could not be the basis for a disinterested historical account. "We have no sources for a biography of Jesus of Nazareth which measure up to the standards of contemporary historical science."[38] The Gospels are "not a history but a picture (Bild) of Jesus the Christ wherein historical and supra-historical elements have been inextricably interwoven."[39] Kaehler points out that the views of Jesus expressed in the nineteenth century lives reflect the authors' presuppositions so that the first century figure is refracted through the lens of the nineteenth century.

Theologically, Kaehler rejected the historical Jesus movement on the doctrinal grounds that it dealt with Jesus as a man analogous to every other man rather than as an absolutely unique individual. Being informed by an Ebionite Christology, the movement portrayed a Jesus of history who could never be anything but a man, however great. As such he remained within the presuppositions of historical science which eo ipso exclude the supra-historical.[40] Because of the world view that informs its method historical science can never speak of a revelation of God, but if Jesus is really the revelation of God, then the real Jesus is not accessible to historical research. "Christian faith has no interest at all in any other picture of Jesus than the New Testament picture of Jesus the Christ as kerygmatically portrayed by the primitive Christian community of believers."[41]

Furthermore, for Kaehler the fundamental flaw in the historical Jesus program was that it made faith dependent on objective historical facts, and the authority of the Gospel contingent upon the authority of an historical scholarship whose results were fluctuating and problematic.

In place of the historical Jesus as the object of faith, Kaehler proposes the "historic (geschlichtliche), Biblical Christ," the Christ of the kerygma. "The real Christ is the Christ who is preached. The Christ who is preached is precisely the Christ of faith."[42] The New Testament picture of Christ is both a trustworthy rendition of Him and the "picture of an earthly figure who lived in history, whose name was Jesus of Nazareth."[43] History, then, for Kaehler does not refer to the naked facts obtained by a disinterested scientific method. Rather, history or the historical cannot be separated from the interpretation given to events and the influence of an interpreted event on the course of subsequent history. Objective history cannot grasp the significance of persons and events, but it is their significance and effects which actually constitute their historicity.

> What is a truly "historic figure," that is, a person who has been influential in molding posterity, as measured by his contribution to history? Is it not the person who originates and bequeaths a permanent influence? . . . What they are in themselves produces effects, and through these effects their influence persists. . . Thus, from a purely historical point of view the truly historic element in any great figure is the discernible personal influence which he exercises upon later generations. But what is the decisive influence that Jesus had upon posterity? According to the Bible and church history it consisted in nothing else but the faith of his disciples, their conviction that in Jesus they had found the conqueror of guilt, sin, temptation and death. From this one influence all others emanate; it is the criterion by which all the others stand or fall.[44]

Kaehler here extends to the nature of history the Reformation principle that Christ is known by his effects; thus, the criterion of the "historical" consists of the abiding effects of a person or event on history. Similarly, a past event is present in terms of its present influence or effects.[45]

The problem of such a procedure is that unless the proclamation about Jesus can be shown to have some relationship with the person and teaching of Jesus himself, it could very easily be construed simply as a symbolic representation of timeless truths. If Jesus of Nazareth were a mythical figure or at best simply the historical occasion by which men became aware of the Divine mercy, it would not change the kerygma. Moreover, the kerygma itself involves references to factual events about Jesus and his teaching which, by their very nature as historical events, must be subject to historical research. To accept them as events on the basis of the witness of the New Testament picture of Jesus the Christ, as Kaehler does, is to invite historical science to investigate them as historical events. To fail to distinguish the actual figure from his effects is an unhistorical procedure insofar as it blurs the distinction between reality and myth or dogma.

Kaehler's enduring contribution to the theological problem of history is to be found in his rejection of "disinterested" historiography and his recognition of the decisiveness of the intentional focus of the interpreter. The importance of his insistence that revelation could not be identified with historical facts cannot be overestimated, but at the same time it blurs the issue by separating revelation too completely from the Jesus of history. Moreover, his conception of the "historical," while it pointed to an important dimension of genuine history, could not be considered a complete view of history involving as it did a rejection of facticity and blurring of the distinction between history and dogma.

Early Dialectical Theology. Dialectical theology generally followed Kaehler's lead in dealing with the relationship between faith and historical science. The dialectical theologians agreed that the Gospels do not constitute sources for an historical reconstruction of the life and teaching of Jesus, and that theologically such a reconstruction is unnecessary even if it were possible historiographically. They categorically refused any attempts to establish faith by means of historical inquiry or in any way to use historical results to support faith. As it was said of Herrmann at his grave, so it could be said of them: it almost seemed as if historical criticism could not be radical enough.

Like Kaehler, dialectical theology saw justification by faith as the center of the gospel, and the dialectical theologians radicalized faith so that it was understood as independent of any human act or belief. Faith was compatible with radical intellectual doubt, including skepticism regarding the historical Jesus. Indeed, faith was practically identified with a sense of the ambiguity and precariousness of human life and the Krisis that resulted from that recognition.

Revelation was seen as the perception of the "infinite qualitative distinction between time and eternity"[46] which called men absolutely into question. Revelation was not the communication of cognitive knowledge nor was it identified with any one historical writing, institution, or person. The Christian becomes aware of the distance between God and man and its resultant Krisis through Jesus of Nazareth, especially through his death, but man can encounter God's revelation "everywhere."[47] Faith is possible through asking the question "Who am I?"

Moreover, the scientific skepticism and the historical relativism of the modern world, far from being antithetical to faith, are both historical products of Christian faith and the very expression of it. Skepticism and relativism confront man with the limitations of his knowledge and the precariousness of his own securities, thus thrusting him on the Absolute beyond the relativities of his own existence.

In sum, since faith was identified not with intellectual assent to any propositions whether historical or dogmatic, but with confidence and trust, it was freed from dependence on the results of historical research. At the same time, the emphasis on the relativity of all human efforts and all human knowledge enabled theology to affirm the results of the most radical historical criticism as a correlate of faith. In this as well as other respects, dialectical theology took a page from Kierkegaard who wrote that faith "is precisely the venture which chooses an objective uncertainty with the passion of the infinite."[48]

However, several problems were raised by this approach. First, faith for Christians is in some way related to Jesus Christ who, whatever else he may be, is also an historical event. What then is the relationship of faith to this event, and what constitutes the historicity of this event? Further, if faith is possible as a result of existential despair or of a sense of human frailty and finitude, why does theology need to speak of a revelation of God in Jesus Christ? The asking of these and other questions led Barth in one direction and Bultmann in another.

Karl Barth: The Later Period. For the mature Barth, the crucial issue for theology was whether Christianity is a message about man, his religious and moral capacities, or about God, his purposes and activities. His answer of course was that we must begin with God, for if we begin with man we cannot speak about God at all. With respect to history this means that faith cannot begin with human history or with historical inquiry, but solely with the history of God as manifested in Jesus Christ, which is sui generis and cannot be incorporated into any general philosophical or historical framework. History as humanly understood has nothing to do with God's revelation. The history that is decisive for faith is the history of God's encounter as God with man, an encounter not accessible to ordinary historical research but only to faith. Yet it is the only real history, for man is an historical being only in relationship to Jesus Christ. The fundamental dualities for Barth are not subject and object or inner and outer, but God and man.

Barth rejects historical inquiry into the life of Jesus on grounds similar to those of Kaehler. Historically, he argues that the gospel texts are not materials of the sort that historians can find acceptable for "objective" accounts because they are highly interpretative responses of the early church to the meaning of Jesus of Nazareth. The best that historical research can do because of the nature of the sources and because of the presuppositions of historical inquiry is to offer a fragmentary or truncated picture of an ordinary man. Therefore, historical method must be rejected on the theological grounds that the real historic Christ is the biblical Christ attested to by the New Testament, not the "so-called historical Jesus." The earthly life of Jesus as it is accessible to historical investigation is not God's revelation; on the contrary, the earthly life is a veiling of the divine. God does not reveal himself in the facts of history but through His Word grasped in faith. Jesus Christ is an event in history but not an historical event; He is God with us and as God with us is not subject to the limits of historical events (e.g., relativity, finiteness, sin). What is decisive for faith is "the Incarnate Word, the risen and exalted one, God manifested in his redeeming action as the object of his (Jesus') disciples' faith."[49] It is the history of God rather than man that is significant. This primal or eternal history (Urgeschichte) refers to God's eternal election of man (including his creation and redemption) through the pre-existence of Christ, the Son of God as man. The word made flesh is simply the temporal realization of God's eternal will. "God rather than man is the eminently historical being."[50]

Barth's views can be somewhat clarified by noting his distinction between Geschichte, Saga, and Historie.[51] Geschichte refers to history Christologically understood, i.e., the history of God's dealings with mankind through Jesus Christ. Historie is ordinary history which, Barth reminds us, omits the vertical dimension which is the real history of God and man. There are historisch elements in Geschichte but it is the unhistorisch element that is decisive. Saga represents a sort of bridge between the two histories, for saga refers to the unhistorisch dimension within the historisch. Saga refers to an imaginative or poetic (mythological?) depiction of unhistorisch events which occur on the plane of history. This concept becomes clearer when we note that saga refers primarily to two points: creation and the eschaton; and the resurrection. The former occur beyond history but point to the limits of history and cannot be dealt with by Historie. The resurrection occurs within a historisch context but is not intelligible as Historie.

One of the several difficulties with Barth's views is that he allows that all history, even Christological history, has historisch elements, yet repudiates historical investigation as having no relevance for theology. The reason for such repudiation cannot be that the historical might undermine faith, for Barth has placed the decisive elements out of reach of historical research in the sphere of Geschichte. Yet what is the relation between the historisch elements and the geschichtlich elements in the "real history of God and man?" Barth's lack of a clear answer to this question reflects the fact that his thinking on the relationship between faith and history is totally polarized. His polarities seem to be that 1) epistemologically, one must decide between two utterly different modes of knowing, either revelation (faith) or empiricism (reason); and 2) the Christological dichotomy corresponding to it, namely that one must choose between the Jesus of history and the dogmatic Christ of faith. For Barth there seems to be no middle ground.

This kind of total duality fits in well with Barth's thought on the freedom and priority of God and on man's utter incapacity to apprehend Him apart from His free self-disclosure. In other words, his understanding of the relationship of faith and history is consistent with his more general views of the utter discontinuity between God and man.

That some duality or two-world thinking is inherent in Christianity is unarguable. However, the problem with the theology of Karl Barth as H. Richard Niebuhr saw it, was that Barth so undercut human history and human capacities vis-a-vis God that he failed to provide an adequate basis for man's apprehension of the divine revelation.

Rudolf Bultmann. It is axiomatic to Bultmann that faith must be independent of the results of historical research. The attempt to base the meaning of faith on historical method would violate justification sola fide by identifying faith with intellectual assent to objective historical propositions. This concern to free faith from assensus is also the intent of Bultmann's demythologizing program. Demythologizing is based on the understanding that the New Testament writers expressed the meaning of the Gospel in terms of supernatural occurrences represented as objective events in the spatio-temporal world, i.e., in "mythological" language. However, the purpose of New Testament mythology is not to win assent to objective doctrines but to bring men to a new self-understanding. Objective statements about reality, whether historical or mythological, must be translated into their true existential significance. In terms of the relationship of faith and history, Bultmann articulates his position by distinguishing between Historie and

Geschichte.

Historie refers to both actual occurrence and the cognitive knowledge of objective historical investigation. It involves the "I-it" relationship between knower and known that is appropriate to the natural sciences.[52] Geschichte refers to personal appropriation of the meaning of the Christ-event; it is that I-Thou encounter with the kerygma that leads to the new existentiell self-understanding called faith.[53]

Even if historical science could satisfactorily reconstruct the facts of Jesus' life, the result would be mere objective knowledge, Historie, which is of no importance so far as the meaning of the event expressed in the kerygma is concerned. The heart of the problem in Bultmann's thinking about faith and history lies in his failure to provide for a satisfactory relationship between Historie and Geschichte. Moreover, while he has consistently maintained that faith cannot be identified with objective historical assertions, he has also insisted that faith is wholly independent of historical affirmations. But the latter does not necessarily follow from the former; Bultmann has apparently failed to distinguish between these two ideas. Just because "the Jesus of history is not kerygma"[54] does not mean that as the basis of the kerygma the Jesus of history is irrelevant to faith. So far as faith is concerned, Bultmann's interest in the historicity of Jesus ends with his mere existence, "that he has come."[55] Of course, part of the difficulty is the identification of factual historicity with objective historiography.

Another major difficulty for Bultmann lies in the sharpness with which he has distinguished objective "knowledge about" from existentiell self-understanding. Knowledge or understanding cannot be both objective and existentiell at once for Bultmann. The distinction between the pure and the practical reason is too sharply drawn.[56] Because the Jesus of history is an objective phenomenon, Bultmann reasons that he cannot be the subject of an existentiell encounter. Faith encounters the Christ who is met in the kerygma "and nowhere else."[57] But what is the relationship between Jesus and the kerygmatic Christ? If the historical Jesus is not in some sense also the (geschichtlich) Christ, then is not the Christ merely symbolic or mythical as some of Bultmann's critics have charged? Bultmann's intention is to keep faith from being identified with assensus and revelation from being equated with objective history. In this respect Bultmann is on better theological ground than those of his critics who want to identify revelation with facticity. However, Bultmann has so polarized Historie and Geschichte that he has left revelation bereft of any content by excluding its relationship to the historical Jesus. "Jesus as the Revealer of God reveals nothing but that he is the Revealer."[58]

Bultmann goes on to insist that the content of revelation is "the shattering and negating of all human self-assertions and all human norms and evaluations."[59] But to say this raises the question of whether Jesus is in any way necessary for faith.[60] The problem then is this: if Christology consists of the articulation of a new understanding of existence, an understanding which is in some way related to or derived from the existence of Jesus, and if faith is understood as a new possibility of existence, in what sense can it be said that faith is dependent on a past act of God in Jesus of Nazareth as Bultmann insists that it is. In what sense is faith dependent on an actual historical event if that event has no content as revelation? Is the death and resurrection of Jesus more than simply the most adequate symbol of authentic existence which the world has ever known?

To this problem Bultmann replies that theoretically it is conceivable that authentic existence is a human possibility apart from an act of God. However, it is only a theoretical possibility or a "possibility in principle" but not a "possibility in fact." Because of the Fall, man has lost the ability to set himself aright and to claim to be able to do so is simply the ultimate example of his fallenness.

> Here then is the crucial distinction between the New Testament and existentialism, between the Christian faith and the natural understanding of Being. The New Testament speaks and faith knows of an act of God through which man becomes capable of self-commitment, capable of faith and love, of his authentic life.[61]

However, as Schubert Ogden and Fritz Buri have shown,[62] Bultmann has not demonstrated that faith is indissolubly tied to the historical act of God in Jesus Christ. All that he has shown is that authentic existence is dependent on God's grace.

A final problem derives from the fact that for Bultmann the historisch cannot be present reality; the past is a dead past. It is relative and problematic and as such cannot be the basis for existentiell encounter. Therefore Bultmann cannot allow the Christ event to be considered in any sense as Historie lest it lose its present significance. That event

> cannot be or become an event of the past, since historical events can never have the meaning of ephapax (once for all). Yet just this belongs to the nature of the Christ-event as an eschatological event.
>
> Therefore, unlike other historical events, it cannot be made present through "remembrance." Rather, it becomes present in the proclamation (or the kerygma), which has its origin in the event itself and without which the event is not at all what it is.[63]

It is its character as a once-for-all event that precludes the event of Jesus Christ from being considered in the same way as other historical events; it is qualitatively different. But is this not to admit that it is not really "historical"? What Bultmann said of early Christianity can be said of him in a somewhat different sense: "History is swallowed up in eschatology."[64] The historic or kerygmatic Christ of faith is unnecessarily sundered from the Jesus of history because of the continued uncritical identification of historical facticity with a disinterested historical method.

The Perspectivist Solution

Albrecht Ritschl. Another attempt to clarify the relationship between faith and history is that of Albrecht Ritschl, whose approach begins with the fundamental distinction, also made by Schleiermacher, between faith as experiential and theology as descriptive. Faith as a noncognitive experience of a present relationship between the believer and Christ has its own grounds which are sui generis and independent of historical inquiry. Theology, on the other hand, as the explication of the knowledge of faith in cognitive categories, is based on historical investigation made from within the context of faith. Theology's task is to clarify the meaning and content of faith by historical study of the person and work of Jesus Christ, the objective historical manifestation corresponding to the living Christ present in the faith of the Christian. In this way historical science is not the basis of faith; instead it provides theology with an objective ground and norm for understanding and interpreting the awareness of Christ given independently in faith. Michael D. Ryan writes that for Ritschl the theologian "does not seek revelation through historical research, but rather he seeks to make revelation intelligible to the Christian community by so interpreting scripture as to produce a 'historically delimited picture of Jesus' life.'"[65]

Ryan notes that the historical picture of Jesus performed a double function for Ritschl's theology: first, it provided a norm for the religious and ethical life of the believer, the "ideal for the God-pleasing life;"[66] second, it made possible "the distinction, which is crucial for theology, between Jesus' earthly existence and the 'abiding influence of His historical manifestation.'"[67]

Neither Ritschl nor his most famous disciples Harnack and Herrmann maintained that historical evidence could establish the validity of Christian faith, as they have been accused.[68] Historical research could and did, however, clarify the content of faith, thereby affirming its historical basis. The essential task of historical investigation from the standpoint of theology was to recover the "essence" of the Gospel from all the speculative accretions that had surrounded it from the first centuries. That task could be carried out by an historical criticism of the Gospels which revealed the unembellished person and teachings of Jesus. "Historical interpretation wants to establish how, if at all, the confession of faith of the Christian church conforms to the historical life of the one it names as the Christ."[69] The process revealed both continuity and discontinuity between the two, but particularly for Ritschl, because of his historical method, continuity predominated. As Durwood Foster points out:

> It is not the witness of faith but the pre- and post-historical transmutations of Jesus over against which Ritschl sets the historical figure. The normativeness of the latter stands against Logos speculation and "spiritual-Christ" fanaticism . . . The living presence of Christ to faith has for its content the biblically portrayed person. The spiritual is bound to the historical.[70]

Ritschl rejected metaphysical speculation about the person of Christ on both Kantian and historical grounds. At the same time, however, he repudiated, on historical and theological grounds, the "historical Jesus" of so-called objective historiography.

> We can discern the full compass of His historical actuality solely from the faith of the Christian community. . . It would be a mistaken purism were anyone, in this respect, to prefer the less developed statements of Jesus to the forms of apostolic thought.[71]

Historical-theological exegesis could reconstruct the true picture of Jesus, not by an objective, disinterested approach, but by a historical method thoroughly informed by faith. Ritschl rejects the notion of a "presuppositionless historiography" on the grounds that all historical research reflects the historian's value assumptions. Thus, "objective" historical method involves negative presuppositions about the presence of God in history and the freedom of the individual. Ritschl insists that faith or the "consciousness of forgiveness" provides a more viable basis for historical research into the New Testament than a naturalistic or rationalistic world-view. The history of Jesus Christ includes his historic effects, the gift of forgiveness.[72]

> Authentic and complete knowledge of Jesus' religious significance . . . depends . . . on one's reckoning oneself part of the community which He founded, and this precisely in so far as it believes itself to have received the forgiveness of sins as His peculiar gift.[73]

In essence, then, Ritschl argues that the Christian perspective offers a legitimate Vorverständnis for historical investigation and that it is only from the standpoint of faith that one can understand the unique historical reality on which faith is grounded. Ritschl offers this conception as more commensurate with the nature of historical reality than either objective scientific method or Hegelian idealism, as represented by F. C. Baur.[74]

The history which the theologian is concerned with is the facticity of the New Testament events as determined by the perspective of faith. Faith's perspective will not limit itself to a "Jesus of history" but will include the meaning of the person and the effects of his life as interpreted by the early Christian community. However, a further distinction must be made between judgments of fact and judgments of value. In his office as historian, the theologian is limited to judgments of fact; the resurrection, for example, is a judgment of value or existential judgment and is beyond the Christian historian's scope as historian. Ritschl is not using a Christian perspectivism to make factual judgments that no historian as historian can make. Rather, he simply insists that it is only from the "inside" of the Christian community that one can understand the meaning of Jesus.

Ritschl had criticized Schleiermacher for having stressed the subjective aspect of faith to the neglect of the objective historical pole. It was Ritschl's intent to rectify this weakness without calling into question Schleiermacher's basic insight into the essentially internal ground of religious conviction.

> If, therefore, God's love or equitable forbearance is recognized as the ground of forgiveness, it is indispensable, with a view to historical fulness of conviction, to connect the latter with a personal activity of Jesus in His vocation as the necessary intermediate cause.[75]

Whether Ritschl succeeded in satisfactorily linking the "personal activity of Jesus" with the presence of the living Christ in faith is an open question. If he did not it was perhaps due less to weaknesses in his formal method than to other assumptions in his thought which had adverse consequences in the material application of his method. One of these was a rather sharp dichotomy between the pure and practical reason, between the experiential grounds of faith and the historical content of faith. This meant that while Ritschl was able to connect the content of present faith with the historical person, he did not provide an adequate basis for the historical mediation of the past event to present experience. This same distinction also led to difficulty in making affirmations about the divine nature of the person of Jesus Christ on historical grounds since Jesus' faith was essentially inaccessible to historical inquiry. Yet his faith was seen as both the ground of his unique relationship to God and in some sense the basis of our faith. Ritschl also maintained the normativeness of Christianity in opposition to historical relativism. He was able to do this only by the unhistorical view that Christianity represented the answer to man's spiritual need to rise above the world of nature. Nevertheless by its insistence on the close relationship between faith and history Ritschl's methodological thought provided more promise than any other approach evolved in the nineteenth century. The thought of H. Richard Niebuhr has much in common with Ritschl in this area, but Niebuhr corrects some of Ritschl's more questionable aspects and, as a result, is able to offer a more viable resolution of the problem.

Adolf von Harnack. Harnack follows Ritschl in distinguishing between faith and history as two different modes of knowing. Faith's certitude is subjective and as such cannot be touched by the results of historical research.

> In history absolute judgments are impossible. . . History can only show how things have been; and even where we can throw light upon the past, and understand and criticize it, we must not presume to think that by any process of abstraction absolute judgments as to the value to be assigned to past events can be obtained from the results of a purely historical survey. Such judgments are the creation only of feeling and of will; they are a subjective act. The false notion that the understanding can produce them is a heritage of that protracted epoch in which knowing and knowledge were expected to accomplish everything; in which it was believed that they could be stretched so as to be capable of covering and satisfying all the needs of the mind and the heart. That they cannot do.[76]

The task of theology, however, is to articulate and clarify the "essence" of Christianity, and its method is historical.

As an historian of dogma, Harnack sought to demonstrate how the Gospel had become embodied in static doctrinal formulations and cultic practices which evolved in subsequent historical epochs, and thereby to free the "kernel" of the Christian message from the "husk" of dogmatic accretions. Theology is an historical enterprise and historical understanding is the task of separating the essence from the temporary historical manifestations. The clue to the essence of Christianity was the life and teaching of Jesus and its effects on believers of every age.

To the criticism that historical science is not able to reconstruct the life and teaching of Jesus with certitude, Harnack's answer is twofold. First, historical criticism has not radically altered our picture of Jesus. Second, faith's certitude is not dependent on historical facts, but on the effects of the New Testament picture of Jesus. There is a kind of pragmatism here: the truth of Jesus is determined by the spiritual impact of his life, and that impact is itself an historical fact which can be accounted for in no other way than by the life of an extraordinary person.[77]

Like Ritschl, Harnack believed that no historical work was without presuppositions, and the assumptions of positivistic history could not yield valid historical understanding. However, he did not believe that the theologian had special access to the historical events of Jesus Christ, but rather that these events, like all historical events, must be understood in their uniqueness.

Harnack believed that historical thinking rather than dogmatics should be the method of theology, for it was only through historical work that a genuine understanding of the Gospel could be achieved. Historical study could discover the essence of Christianity by separating it from the "temporary historical forms in which it is clothed."[78]

Harnack's reinterpretation of the essence of Christianity resulted in a somewhat truncated version of the Gospel. However, he did insist that the meaning of the faith could not be separated from the actual historical person even though he failed to relate adequately the person of Jesus Christ and the subjective experience of faith. His discussion of the "essence" of Christianity, though rooted in a questionable Idealist metaphysics, showed an essentially historical understanding of human existence. His work has perhaps been underrated as a result of the strong reaction of dialectical theology against Liberalism.

Historicism: Ernst Troeltsch

Perhaps no Christian thinker was more acutely aware than was Ernst Troeltsch of the thoroughly historical character of all human thought and values, and no one posed more persistently and with greater intellectual honesty the question of the significance and meaning of the historical consciousness for faith. He was convinced that the historical mode of thought had become too deeply imbedded in the world view of modern man for Christian theology to take it less than seriously. Only through a consistent application of the historical reason to the understanding and interpretation of Christianity could that faith remain a viable option for modern man.

Troeltsch was utterly convinced of the necessity of a vital religious faith, but he also believed just as firmly that much of traditional Christian belief was incompatible with historical thought. He saw clearly that it was not so much the results of historical critical research as historicism itself, the entire historical mode of thinking, that presented both a threat and a challenge to Christianity. Historicism has been variously conceived and defined,[79] but for Troeltsch it meant generally "the point of view which conceives of history as the only knowable reality and therefore of historical method as the way of knowing reality."[80] Historicism obviously represents a Neo-Kantian understanding of the limits of human knowledge, but it also represents a concern to reassert human values in reaction to scientific positivism and naturalism.[81] It was Troeltsch's enduring contribution to theology to work out with unrelenting consistency the implications of historicism for Christian faith. We shall concentrate in this discussion on what Troeltsch believed to be the fundamental assumptions of the historical mode of thought and their implications for Christianity, dealing first with the nature and logic of history.

Historiography. Following Windelband, Rickert and Dilthey (but modifying them somewhat), Troeltsch distinguished between history and natural science on the basis that the former is ideographic while the latter is nomothetic. History is concerned with the unique and unrepeatable, and the historian's purpose is not, as is the scientists's, to organize events into general laws but to understand the concrete individual in its historical context of development.[82] History is the study of human life and events, and man, though linked to nature, also transcends it through reason.[83] Further, while science is concerned with quantitative measurements, history deals with qualitative distinctions and thus with the question of value.[84] As opposed to rationalism, historical thought is empirical, and its categories must be arrived at inductively.[85]

Although history is composed of individual persons and events, these must be seen and understood in the context of the larger wholes of which they are a part. Both individuals and historical aggregates must be understood in terms of their continuous connection with what preceded them and in terms of their goal-directed movement. The historian's task is to perceive the "concrete individual in its historical connection of becoming."[86]

On the basis of the dialectic between individuality and development (and with a debt to Weber's concept of ideal type), Troeltsch put forward his notion of historical essence. The concept of essence "is the attempt to represent numerous details by the central characteristic contained in them, by the identification of their principal dynamic."[87] The essence of Christianity cannot be identified with any particular manifestation of it; it can only be understood as "a gradual unfolding of an immanent impelling power or fundamental ideal, realizing itself in historical Christianity."[88] Troeltsch criticized Schleiermacher, Hegel, and Harnack for identifying the essence of Christianity with one particular doctrine or historical expression rather than "as the actual unity of all the factors in the historical development."[89] Harnack, for example, as Troeltsch understood him, had equated the essence of Christianity with its historical genesis in the preaching of Jesus about the kingdom. But for Troeltsch there was no permanent core to Christianity or any other historical individuality.[90] Individualities in their development have such a variety of formulations and expressions that no one idea can dominate the whole. The essence of Christianity is its development, not a self-identical idea or substratum that simply receives different modifications but remains essentially unchanged. This latter notion was a product of Idealism and could not be held apart from an Idealist ontology.

> The essence of Christianity can be understood only as the productive power of the historical Christian religion to create new interpretations and new adaptations -- a power which lies deeper than any historical formulation which it may have produced.[91]

The essence of Christianity "differs in different epochs;"[92] only so can Christianity be considered genuinely historical. The concept of essence indicates historical continuity amid change and development, but the "essence" itself is dynamic, developing.

Troeltsch's view allows for an understanding of Christianity as a thoroughly historical phenomenon that grows and develops new forms to meet the changing demands or needs of different epochs. By refusing to equate essential Christianity with any one historical expression of it, Troeltsch was also able to avoid absolutizing any one relative historical manifestation and to see each historical expression as valid for its own time but not necessarily for any other period.

Although the essence of Christianity is ascertained by historical study, it involves more than a mere objective historical account.

> This essence is actually the subjective, personal interpretation and synthesis which present thinking derives from the entire situation with reference to actual living issues and for the purpose of directing future activity. Thus there is involved a general historical feeling and understanding, but also a subjective and creative interpretation and construction.[93]

Troeltsch moves from historical considerations to the task of present theological construction. History provides the basis for theological understanding but it also provides the method within which the specific task of theology, "the exposition of the content of this essential Christianity,"[94] must be carried out.

History and Theology. In the early essay on "Historische und dogmatische Methode in der Theologie"[95] Troeltsch spelled out what he took to be the three basic presuppositions of historical method and offered some suggestions regarding their implications for theology. The first of these, "historical criticism," "implies that in the realm of history there are only judgments of probability, . . . and that all historical materials must be evaluated in terms of their degree of probability."[96] This poses the theological problem of how mere historical probability can be the basis of a claim to absolute validity, a kind of historicist version of Lessing's dictum that "incidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason."[97]

The second principle is that of analogy, by which Troeltsch meant that we can make judgments of probability only if we assume that our present experience is not unlike the experience of people in the past. "The observation of analogies between similar events of the past provides the possibility of imputing probability to them, of interpreting the unknown of the past by the known of the present."[98] Without this principle, it would be impossible to understand the past, but with it, it seems impossible to claim that Jesus was qualitatively different from other men. The uniqueness of any historical event is limited by its similarity to events in our present experience. Orthodox belief, by holding to the divine nature of Jesus and to supernatural events such as miracle and resurrection, clearly goes beyond the possibility of historical judgment. The argument is often made that this principle merely illustrates Troeltsch's nineteenth century "naturalistic-positivistic" bias, but if so, it is surely a "bias" shared by twentieth century man as well. At any rate, we have no other criteria for understanding the past than those we use in understanding present experience.

The third principle is that of correlation, the understanding that all historical events are so interrelated as to be capable of being understood only in the context of other events that precede and surround them. An historical event must be understood in terms of its antecedents and consequences and this implies further that all events are conditioned by and relative to their time and place. Troeltsch insisted that the idea of supernatural intervention could not be used to account for an event because this violated the continuity of the causal sequence and, further, that no event could be regarded as having absolute validity since every truth and value is historically conditioned and relative.

Troeltsch refused to exempt Christianity from these criteria of historical knowledge. He accepted the view of the religionsgeschichtliche Schule that Christianity was a purely historical phenomenon and as such conditioned by its historical milieu like every other historical individuality. The events in which it originated as well as the various stages of its subsequent development were subject to established methods of historical investigation. As a purely historical development, Christianity had to surrender every vestige of supernaturalism, no matter in how sophisticated a manner such might be presented, and every claim to a special revelation exempt from the canons of historical method.

Troeltsch objected to what seemed to him to be the "provincialism of theology since Schleiermacher,"[99] the claim that faith was grounded in a unique religious awareness. This "dogmatic method" relied on the assumption of an inner miracle that was according to Troeltsch really no different from the nature miracles to which orthodoxy appealed. Historical method has no place for a special revelation of God in certain events to the exclusion of others, whether that divine intervention is understood in terms of man's inner life or in terms of external events. In either case appeal is made to a holy history (Heilsgeschichte) qualitatively different from ordinary history.

> To be sure, the dogmatic method also desires to base itself upon "history." But this is not the usual secular history . . . It is much rather the history of salvation (Heilsgeschichte) and a nexus of data relating to salvation which as such can be known and proved only to the believer.[100]

Moreover, theology had to give up the idea of the absolute validity of Christian faith and ascertain instead in what sense we can speak of

> the normative aspect of the Christian world of ideas and of life only in the vague sense in which this remains possible after one frankly acknowledges that the supernatural inspiration and revelation of the Bible can no longer furnish the ground for this conception.[101]

Within the perspective that all historical truth is relative and that Christianity is fully historical, Troeltsch attempted to answer the problem of the validity of Christianity. He criticized the "evolutionary" conceptions of the absoluteness of Christianity as set forth by Schleiermacher and Hegel on the grounds that historical understanding does not support the idea of a general concept of religion which is fulfilled in Christianity. Rather the concept of individuality sees each religious manifestation fulfilling its own immanent possibilities.[102] Moreover, Hegel and Schleiermacher had made their judgment of the superiority of Christianity from the standpoint of a Western culture permeated so thoroughly by the thought forms of Christianity as to make any other judgment unlikely. Thus relativity means not only that events must be understood in the context of their time and place but also that the perspective of the interpreter is historically conditioned.

In his earlier writings Troeltsch thought he could establish the absoluteness of Christianity on the basis of a comparison of the religions of the world. He thought that Christianity had the highest claim to universality because of the depth of its understanding of the nature of God and man.[103] He later saw that this judgment itself was an historically conditioned judgment, and that if we take the concept of individuality seriously we must realize that we can never step outside our own cultural heritage to the extent of being able to understand fully a religion other than our own.

In his later thought, and due to his concentration on the concept of individuality, Troeltsch insisted that we can make no claim for the validity or normative significance of Christianity beyond our own culture. Christian faith is relative to Western culture (what he called European civilization), but within that sphere it is valid. The claim to absolute truth must be surrendered.

> All our thoughts and feelings are impregnated with Christian motives and Christian presuppositions; and, conversely, our whole Christianity is indissolubly bound up with elements of the ancient and modern civilizations of Europe. From being a Jewish sect Christianity has become the religion of all Europe. It stands or falls with European civilization. . . Its primary claim to validity is thus the fact that only through it have we become what we are, and that only in it can we preserve the religious forces that we need. . . We cannot live without a religion, yet the only religion that we can endure is Christianity, for Christianity has grown up with us and has become a part of our very being.[104]

However, the denial of absolute and universal validity to Christianity does not mean that it is not true. Relativism need not mean skepticism or agnosticism. We must distinguish the relative and normative from the absolute, but we can speak of the normative significance of our beliefs. The relative may indeed not be absolute, but it may be a relative expression of the absolute.

> Christianity could not be the religion of such a highly developed racial group if it did not possess a mighty spiritual power and truth; in short, if it were not, in some degree, a manifestation of the Divine Life itself. The evidence we have for this remains essentially the same, whatever may be our theory concerning absolute validity -- it is the evidence of a profound inner experience. This experience is undoubtedly the criterion of its validity, but, be it noted, only of its validity for us. It is God's countenance as revealed to us; it is the way in which, being what we are, we receive, and react to, the revelation of God. It is binding upon us, and it brings us deliverance. It is final and unconditional for us, because we have nothing else, and because in what we have we can recognize the accents of the divine voice.[105]

> A truth which, in the first instance, is a truth for us does not cease, because of this, to be very Truth and Life.[106]

H. Richard Niebuhr regarded Troeltsch's struggle with the question of religious certitude in the midst of historical relativity as central to his thought. In his doctoral dissertation, "Ernst Troeltsch's Philosophy of Religion," Niebuhr notes the importance of the concept of historical Fate, a notion that was to play a key role in Niebuhr's thinking.

> Instead of regarding Troeltsch's philosophy of religious history therefore as the philosophy of relativism, it may be regarded as the philosophy of complete obligation. Christianity is not only the sufficient religion, it is the imperative religion; it is our Fate. We are bound to treasure and to develop and to supply it not only because we have been born Christians, but because the inner voice of duty compels us to recognize it as our highest value. Not the sufficiency of Christianity but the inevitability of Christianity is the watchword of Troeltsch's philosophy of religious history.[107]

Theological Method and the Historical Jesus. In "The Dogmatics of the Religionsgeschichtliche Schule," Troeltsch set forth a theological method based on historical science which he saw as fundamentally identical with Schleiermacher's method as adumbrated in the Kurze Darstellung, although Schleiermacher had failed to carry it out consistently.[108] The first task of such a dogmatics would be to establish the "supremacy of Christianity for our own culture"[109] on the basis of historical and philosophical considerations. The second task would be to ascertain the meaning or "essence" of Christianity, again by the application of historical understanding. We have noted Troeltsch's work on these two problems. The third and central task is "the exposition of the content of this essential Christianity"[110] and this has a twofold division into the historical and the "metaphysical" or conceptual. The historical aspect sets forth "the religious significance of the historical foundations -- of the prophets, of Jesus, of the development of the Christian spirit in history; in particular, the person of Jesus here stands in the foreground."[111] The conceptual part of this task deals with the adumbration of "the Christian conceptions of God, of the world, and of men,"[112] of redemption and eschatology.

Finally, Troeltsch mentions a fourth aspect which, though not a specific task, pertains to his conception of the general character of theology.

> A dogmatics of this sort, presupposes scientific conclusions and methods; it is itself, however, not a science; it is rather a confession of faith and a systematic exposition of this confession for the guidance of preaching and of religious instruction.[113]

The purpose of dogmatics is a practical one; its task is not to set forth eternal truth either as a "fixed revealed standard" or as "eternally self-identical speculative principles."[114] It is consistent with the understanding and methods of both the natural and historical sciences, but it is itself personal and confessional rather than absolutistic or universal and scientific. Troeltsch has here offered a point of view that was to be emphasized by H. Richard Niebuhr.

Although Troeltsch insisted that theology cannot presume to set forth its doctrines as "an unchangeable fixed truth,"[115] since historical consciousness had shown the relativity of all such claims, he nevertheless insisted that theology is not therefore "an irresponsible piece of subjectivism,"[116] since it is based on the objective history of Christianity and takes its point of departure from a scientific interpretation of that history. His treatment of the significance of the historicity of Jesus illumines his conception of the nature and place of such an objective ground for faith.[117]

First, Troeltsch insisted that the facts about Jesus' life and teachings can only be established by historical science. Those facts are no different from all other historical facts. At this point, he disagreed with the position of Kaehler and others who held that the New Testament picture of Jesus as the Christ was quite sufficient for faith. "If Jesus' historicity is important and essential for faith, so also are positive results from historical study."[118]

But if Christianity is understood in a more radical way as faith in God which is a present experience of His redeeming love, then what is the significance of Jesus? Two answers are possible: 1) Jesus is simply the historical occasion of the rise of such a faith and as such has important symbolic meaning but is not essential. Such a view makes faith independent of historical research into the life of Jesus, although Troeltsch could also argue that even this view needs a historically established basis. A symbol has historical origins. 2) The other alternative, the one Troeltsch adopted, is that the person of Jesus is essential to the Christian religion. Here faith is dependent on history, but its dependence is not an absolute one, for the Christian religion is not the absolute or final version of faith. The historical Jesus is essential for Christianity but only relatively necessary for faith.

However, every religion must have a center, a unifying point, and for Christianity that center is an historical personality. Thus for Christianity the historical actuality of Jesus is necessary, and Troeltsch thinks that the essential facts of Jesus' life and message have been well established. His argument for the significance of the historical Jesus is as much psychological as it is historical. Troeltsch also adds the dimension that the fact that the person of Jesus has through a long history served as the unifying point of Christianity adds to the necessity of his historicity. Jesus' symbolic significance for Christian faith can only be guaranteed by his actual historical existence.

This is Troeltsch's Christocentric principle, but the importance of Jesus lay in the fact that he pointed beyond himself.

> "God in Christ" can mean for us only that we worship in Jesus the highest revelation of God open to us and that we make the picture of Jesus (das Bild Jesu) the gathering point of all self-declarations of God which are found within our sphere of life.[119]

Conclusion. The significance of Troeltsch for theology lies, of course, in his relentless determination to understand Christian faith within the context of the modern historical consciousness. His starting point and basic presuppositions were modern historical method, and he sought with unwavering honesty to apply these presuppositions to faith and theological method. For Troeltsch historical method and historical thinking must supplant the traditional dogmatic methodology that had characterized theology. Christianity must be understood in the same way as any other historical phenomenon, and that meant that it must be seen as "a relative historical development emerging and taking form in a specific historical and social context and having significance only for the context in which it has its being."[120] Such a view did not rule out divine revelation, however, for Troeltsch believed that all history manifests relative embodiments of the Absolute. It did mean that Christianity could claim no qualitatively unique revelation and that Christian faith could not claim absolute validity for all cultures and all times.

The "early" Troeltsch had postulated a "religious a priori" to account for man's apparently universal religious expression. This concept simply pointed to a kind of inherent capacity of the human consciousness to seek absolute Being, a capacity that was never found in "pure" form but only formed through historical experience. But it did point to Troeltsch's belief that the historical is related to or participates genuinely in the Absolute, if in a relative way. In this sense Troeltsch

> found it necessary to turn away from the concreteness and individuality of history in order to avoid the skeptical conclusion to which his approach to history pushes him. Consequently, the category of history in spite of its manifest importance to Troeltsch is not in the last analysis sufficient to legitimate religious and moral values in human life and culture. In order to attain that end Troeltsch must rather look to a non-historical dimension in human experience . . . which cannot itself be conditioned by or subjected to the relativities of historical process.[121]

Historical method must be supplemented by philosophy of religion which can supply the rationale for the grounding of history in the Absolute. Troeltsch not only adumbrated the limitations of theological claims resulting from the implications of historical consciousness; he also saw the limitations of historical thinking for the problems of faith and of value.

The difficulty with Troeltsch's thought lay in its inability to understand Christianity in the final analysis as more than the noblest cultural expression of the Western world. Troeltsch's historicism was forced to surrender many of the more profound symbols and conceptions of Christian faith, and it was not without significance that H. Richard Niebuhr referred in his doctoral dissertation to Troeltsch's thought not as a theology but as a "philosophy of religion." It was an heroic but impossible attempt to base Christian faith entirely on the historical reason. Yet Troeltsch's failure could not mean that theology should forsake history, but only that it must reinterpret the meaning of history's relationship to faith.

Conclusion

That Christianity is in some sense historical, since it had its origin in historical events, is undeniable. But the rise of modern historical consciousness and its expression in historical method and historical-critical research posed a number of decisive and interrelated challenges for theology. Among these was the epistemological problem of the relationship between the historian's perception of events and that of the theologian. Several kinds of answers emerged with various theological consequences.

The first was the position that the theologian has no special access to the Biblical events. For the theologian to claim to have a special vantage point was, as Troeltsch suggested, to relegate Christian faith to the sphere of miracle so unacceptable to modern man.

This position found at least two different kinds of responses in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. One of these held that because historical research yields results which are antithetical to and destructive of faith, it cannot be the basis of faith. Faith must have other grounds, either rational or mystical. We have noted that in their own ways, Strauss and Schweitzer represent this position.

The other type of response maintained that historical research and method are determinative of faith, and therefore faith must be radically reinterpreted to take account of history. Troeltsch was the clearest representative of this approach.

The difficulty with the first of these responses is, of course, that the historicity of Christianity and of human existence is in fact denied. Jesus Christ becomes simply an unwitting occasion by which the truth about God and man enter human history. In the second response, a truncated Christianity becomes identified with the noblest aspects and ideals of European civilization. In either of these cases, one is finally driven away from history into idealism or mysticism inasmuch as it is not possible to speak of God and history together.

A second major attempt to resolve the faith-history dilemma involved a rejection of historical science as irrelevant to faith and a redefinition of history or "the historical" to mean the historic effects of the New Testament interpretation of Jesus as the Christ. This approach in all its variations, however, begged the question of the actual historicity of the man Jesus since it rejected completely any attempt to ground Christology in historical fact by the only means available, historical research. As a result, the person of Jesus tended to be split off from the Christ of faith. This approach reached its logical conclusion in the thought of Bultmann with the problem that revelation is devoid of content. In the theology of Karl Barth this approach took another direction in which it was maintained that it is the history of God, not of man, that is determinative of human existence. This _Urgeschichte_ touches man's history in Jesus Christ but its very nature is such that it is imperceptible to scientific history. However, if God's history is somehow related to man's, why is it immune from historical investigation? Moreover, what is the relationship between the "Jesus of history" and the Word of God that entitles us to speak of an historical act of God in Jesus Christ?

A third approach, the Ritschlian, was based on the premise that all historical knowledge involves value judgments or presuppositions, and therefore that the standpoint of faith yields valid historical knowledge. With respect to the New Testament the believer's standpoint is the true one. While this view connected the Biblically portrayed person with the content of the living presence of Christ to faith, it presented other problems. Among these was the difficulty of speaking of the person of Jesus Christ as divine; the emphasis was necessarily on his humanity. This was complicated by a view of faith as inner experience that made mediation difficult and a view of Jesus' uniqueness as inhering in his perfect God-consciousness inaccessible to historical understanding. Nevertheless this approach held the most promise for a resolution of the problem of faith and history that would be faithful to both.

As Troeltsch saw, the challenge of the modern conception of history affected more than historiographical questions. The nature of faith, the meaning of the person and work of Jesus Christ, the scope and task of theology, and the validity of Christianity -- these were as deeply involved as the epistemological problem of the historical Jesus.

The understanding of faith as an immediate relationship to God which had been generally accepted since Schleiermacher posed serious difficulties for historical-theological thinking. So long as faith was regarded as essentially subjective, "'shut up' in feeling,"[122] its relationship to history was problematic. We have noted various ways in which faith was separated from history, although theology may have been conceived as an historical enterprise. Two major consequences followed from this conception of faith.

First, the faith of Jesus -- generally held to be the basis of his unique relationship to the Father -- was not accessible to historical reconstruction. While this protected his unique Sonship from historical questioning, it also meant that Christological affirmations could not be supported historically, resulting in a gulf between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. Further, if historical investigation were to cast some doubts on Jesus' messianic consciousness, it could lead to skepticism about his uniqueness.[123]

Closely related to this was the problem of how an essentially subjective experience could be mediated historically. The difficulty could be overcome either by closing the gap between inner and outer, subjective and objective, as Schleiermacher had tried to do, or by offering a new understanding of the nature of faith that would be more consistent with the historicity of man. The problem was not resolved in the nineteenth century.

Finally, how was it possible to maintain the decisive character of the role of Jesus Christ within the context of historical relativism? Could Christianity claim any more validity than any other religion or world view?

It is clear that what was required was a new conceptualization of Christian faith that took account of man's self-understanding as an historical being. Such a resymbolization is to be found in the thought of H. Richard Niebuhr.

NOTES

[1] *Protestant Thought: From Rousseau to Ritschl*, trans. Brian Cozens (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), p. 331.

[2] Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, trans. H. R. Mackintosh, J. S. Stewart *et al.* (2nd German ed.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928), par. 3, p. 5.

[3] The close relationship of Schleiermacher's thought at this point to the philosophy of Kant is immediately obvious. In *The Critique of Judgment* Kant had attempted to get beyond the epistemological dualism created by the first two critiques by understanding the principle offered by aesthetic judgment, the feeling of pleasure and pain, as effecting a mediation between the two functions of the reason. Schleiermacher's Kantianism is well known, and need not detain us here, but the similarity between the aesthetically described religious self-consciousness and the Kantian "judgment" is striking, especially in the Schleiermacher of the *Reden*. (*On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, trans. John Oman [New York: Harper & Row, 1958]. Cf., e.g., the Second Speech, "The Nature of Religion," pp. 26-118.)

[4] Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, par. 4, p. 12.

[5] *Ibid.*, par. 4, no. 4, p. 16.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

[7] *Ibid.*, par. 5, no. 3, p. 21.

[8] Fifth Speech, "The Religions," pp. 210-265.

[9] Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, par. 5, no. 3, p. 22.

[10] *Ibid.*, par. 32, no. 1, p. 131.

[11] Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline on the Study of Theology*, trans. Terrence N. Tice (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1966), par. 35, p. 30. Thus, Richard R. Niebuhr writes: "Where history is concerned, and the subject matter is, accordingly, man as agent, the universal is rather to be sought out as present fully and in a unique way in each of its particular embodiments. . . . By reason of this fact, the idea of man, whether it be of man philosophizing or man struggling to order his relations to God and the world, is always qualified by the historical identity of the individual in and through which it is grasped." (*Schleiermacher on Christ and Religion* [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964], p. 229.)

[12] Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, par. 60, no. 2, p. 246.

[13] *Ibid*., par. 6, no. 2, p. 27.

[14] Cf. *Ibid*., pars. 71-72, pp. 285-304.

[15] *Ibid*., par. 15, no. 2, p. 77.

[16] R. R. Niebuhr, p. 146, citing Schleiermacher's *Leben Jesu*, p. 130.

[17] Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, par. 14, no. 1, p. 69.

[18] Jack Forstman, "Barth, Schleiermacher and *The Christian Faith*," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, XXI, 3 (March, 1966), p. 309.

[19] Cf. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, par. 10, Postscript, p. 52.

[20] *Ibid*., quoted and trans. by Forstman, p. 309.

[21] Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline*, par. 71, p. 42.

[22] *Ibid*., par. 69, p. 41.

[23] *Ibid*., par. 196, p. 72.

[24] Leopold Ranke, *Geschichten der romanischen und germanischen Volker von 1494 bis 1835* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1824) I, vi; quoted by Ralph G. Wilburn, *The Historical Shape of Faith* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966), p. 104.

[25] Wilhelm Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften*, V (Leipzig & Berlin: B. G. Teubner, 1924), p. 144.

[26] Wilhelm Dilthey, *Pattern and Meaning in History*, ed. and trans. H. P. Rickman (New York: Harper & Bros., 1962), p. 67. This book consists of excerpts from Volume VII of Dilthey's *Gesammelte Schriften*, and the quotation is from page 191 of the original.

[27] Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften*, V, p. 172, quoted by H. A. Hodges, *The Philosophy of Wilhelm Dilthey* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1952), p. 124.

[28] Cf. Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, trans. W. Montgomery (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1961), p. 4 *et passim.*

[29] *Ibid*., p. 13.

[30] *Ibid*., p. 16.

[31] *Ibid*., p. 23.

[32] Ibid., p. 24.

[33] Van A. Harvey, The Historian and the Believer, (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1966), p. 9.

[34] Ibid., p. 11.

[35] Schweitzer, p. 79.

[36] Ibid., p. 401.

[37] Trans. Carl E. Braaten (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964).

[38] Ibid., p. 48.

[39] Carl E. Braaten, "Martin Kaehler on the Historic Biblical Christ," The Historical Jesus and the Kerygmatic Christ, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Roy A. Harrisville (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964), p. 85.

[40] Cf. Kaehler, p. 62, n. 30.

[41] Braaten, p. 87.

[42] Kaehler, p. 66.

[43] Braaten, p. 95.

[44] Kaehler, pp. 63-64.

[45] Michael D. Ryan has pointed out that "Kaehler could identify the historical Christ with the Christ of the Bible in a way that left no doubt that this Christ has more of a claim on the adjective 'real' than has any portrait drawn by a historian. Kaehler expressed his identification of the Biblical Christ with the historic or real Christ by making a very interesting, albeit problematic, play on the root of the German word for real -- wirklich. The verb wirken means to effect, to do, to bring about. So, as Kaehler put it, 'The real (wirkliche), that is the effective (wirksame) Christ, who marches through the history of nations . . . -- this real Christ is the preached Christ.'" "The Role of the Discipline of History in the Theological Interpretation of Albrecht Ritschl" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Drew University, 1967), pp. 24-25, quoting Martin Kaehler, Der sogenannte historische Jesus und der geschichtliche, biblische Christus, p. 44 (English trans., p. 66), trans. by Ryan.

[46] Karl Barth, The Epistle to the Romans, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (6th ed.; London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 10.

[47] Ibid., p. 97.

[48] Søren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, trans. David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 182.

[49] Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, Vol. I: The Doctrine of the Word of God, trans. G. T. Thompson (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936 et seq.), part 2, p. 64.

[50] John D. Godsey, "History of Salvation and World History," The Drew Gateway, XXXIV (Winter, 1964), p. 90.

[51] This paragraph is based on Thomas Ogletree's excellent treatment of Barth in Christian Faith and History (New York: Abingdon Press, 1965), pp. 192-219.

[52] R. E. Cushman ("Is the Incarnation a Symbol?" Theology Today, XV, 2 [July, 1958], pp. 167-182) makes the point that the basic distinction between Historie and Geschichte in Bultmann corresponds to Buber's distinction between "I-it" and "I-Thou."

[53] Schubert Ogden points out that existentiell is a technical term for Bultmann and refers to "that which has to do with the individual's own unique situation and responsibility." (Christ Without Myth [New York: Harper & Row, 1961], p. 7.) Bultmann uses it in distinction from existential which refers to existentialist philosophy's analysis of the human situation. The distinction is essentially one of abstract cognitive knowledge (existential) and concrete non-cognitive self-understanding (existentiell).

[54] Rudolf Bultmann, "A Reply to the Theses of J. Schniewind," Bultmann et al., Kerygma and Myth, ed. Hans W. Bartsch (New York: Harper & Bros., 1961), p. 117.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Richard R. Niebuhr points this out in Resurrection and Historical Reason (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957), pp. 58-59. It is also borne out by the following statement by Bultmann: "I am deliberately renouncing any form of encounter with a phenomenon of past history, including an encounter with the Christ after the flesh, in order to encounter the Christ proclaimed in the kerygma, which confronts me in my historic situation." (Kerygma and Myth, p. 117.)

[57] Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," Kerygma and Myth, p. 41.

[58] Rudolf Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, trans. Kendrick Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), II, 66. Italics are in the text.

[59] Ibid., p. 67, quoted by Van Harvey, p. 144.

[60] Cf. Harvey, p. 144.

[61] Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," p. 33.

[62] Ogden, Christ Without Myth, and Fritz Buri, in Kerygma und Mythos, ed. Hans W. Bartsch (Hamburg: Herbert Reich Evangelischer Verlag, 1952), II, 85-101.

[63] Rudolf Bultmann, "On the Problem of Demythologizing," The Journal of Religion, XLII, 2 (April, 1962), p. 102.

[64] Rudolf Bultmann, History and Eschatology (New York: Harper & Bros., 1957), p. 37.

[65] Ryan, p. 61, quoting Albrecht Ritschl, Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung, III, 1, 341, hereafter cited RV. English translation, The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation, trans. H. R. Mackintosh and A. B. Macaulay (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1900), Vol. III, hereafter cited JR. This present discussion of Ritschl is greatly indebted to Ryan's excellent dissertation.

[66] Ryan, p. 62, quoting Ritschl, JR, III, 166.

[67] Ibid., quoting Ritschl, JR, III, 432.

[68] See, e.g., James M. Robinson, A New Quest of the Historical Jesus (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1959), p. 31, where reference is made to the "Ritschlian attempt to prove Christianity historically."

[69] Ryan, p. 268.

[70] A. Durwood Foster, "Albrecht Ritschl," A Handbook of Christian Theologians, ed. Dean G. Peerman and Martin E. Marty (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1965), p. 61.

[71] Ritschl, JR, III, 3.

[72] This point is well made by Ryan, pp. 56 ff.

[73] Ritschl, JR, III, 2.

[74] See Ryan, pp. 222-223:

> "Ritschl insists that the genuine uniqueness of the individual as the subject of an historical course must be maintained and that it can be so maintained only if understood as God's creation rather than as the result of a natural generic process. Human freedom grounded in God must be maintained as a factor, indeed an important factor in history. . .
>
> With this argument Ritschl stakes a claim on the ground of the discipline of history for an interpretation of history as seen from within a frame of reference constituted by the Christian faith."

[75] Ritschl, JR, III, 540, quoted by Ryan, p. 64.

[76] Adolf von Harnack, What is Christianity?, trans. Thomas B. Saunders (New York: Harper & Bros., 1957), p. 18. The present discussion is drawn primarily from this work and Harnack's Christianity and History, trans. T. B. Saunders (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1896).

[77] Cf. Harnack, Christianity and History, pp. 31 ff., pp. 52-62 et passim.

[78] Harnack, Wesen des Christentums, p. xix, quoted by Wilhelm Pauck, "Adolf von Harnack," A Handbook of Christian Theologians, p. 100.

[79] R. N. Beck and D. H. Lee ("The Meaning of Historicism," The American Historical Review, LIX, 3 [April, 1954], pp. 568-577) note seven different definitions. Emil Fackenheim notes the plethora of meanings given to the term and adds: "But only one of these deserves to be called classical. Historicism, in the classical sense, is the position which asserts that all philosophical are superceded by historical questions." (Metaphysics and Historicity, p. 61.) In this sense Troeltsch in his later writings would qualify as an historicist.

[80] Carl Michalson, Worldly Theology, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967), p. 1.

[81] See Beck and Lee, p. 575. Cf. also p. 577, where historicism is defined as "a) the belief that the trust, meaning and value of anything, i.e., the basis of any evaluation, is to be found in its history; and, more narrowly, b) the antipositivistic and antinaturalistic view that historical knowledge is a basic, or the only, requirement for understanding and evaluating man's present political, social, and intellectual position or problems." Both aspects of this definition apply to Troeltsch with almost no qualifications.

[82] Ernst Troeltsch, "Historiography," Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, ed. James Hastings (New York: Scribner's, 1914), VI, 720.

[83] Cf. Ernst Troeltsch, Christian Thought: Its History and Application, ed. Baron von Hügel (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), p. 90.

[84] Cf. Ogletree, p. 27.

[85] Cf. James Luther Adams, "Ernst Troeltsch as Analyst of Religion," Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, I, 1 (October, 1961), p. 107: "The a prioris of reason are purely formal, . . . they find their content in the world of historical actualities, and . . . they thereby become subject to the changes of history."

[86] Ernst Troeltsch, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. III: *Der Historismus und Seine Probleme* (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1922), p. 36.

[87] Ogletree, p. 27.

[88] Ernst Troeltsch, "The Dogmatics of the Religionsgeschichtliche Schule," *The American Journal of Theology*, XVII, 1 (1913), pp. 11-12. Hereafter cited "Dogmatics."

[89] *Ibid.*, p. 12.

[90] Troeltsch's concept of an historical individuality refers to historical wholes or aggregates ("*historische Totalitäten*," [Troeltsch, "Historiography," p. 720]) which are unique and unrepeatable and which form a unit because of a common meaning or value.

[91] Troeltsch, "Dogmatics," p. 12.

[92] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

[93] *Ibid.*

[94] *Ibid.*

[95] *Gesammelte Schriften*, II. pp. 729-753.

[96] *Ibid.*, pp. 731 f., quoted and trans. by William Jerry Boney, "On the Understanding of Christian Faith as Historical," (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Drew University, 1962), p. 21.

[97] G. E. Lessing, *Lessing's Theological Writings*, ed. Henry Chadwick, p. 31, quoted by Alan Richardson, *History Sacred and Profane* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1964), p. 28.

[98] Troeltsch, *Gesammelte Schriften*, II. p. 732, quoted by Boney, p. 21.

[99] Hans W. Frei, "Niebuhr's Theological Background," *Faith and Ethics*, ed. Paul Ramsey (New York: Harper & Bros., 1957) p. 54.

[100] Troeltsch, *Gesammelte Schriften*, II, pp. 740 f., quoted by Boney, p. 44.

[101] Troeltsch, "Dogmatics," p. 5.

[102] Troeltsch, *Christian Thought*, pp. 44-45.

[103] Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 50, where Troeltsch reviews the arguments he set forth in *Die Absolutheit des Christentums und die Religionsgeschichte*.

[104] Troeltsch, *Christian Thought*, pp. 53-55.

[105] *Ibid.*, p. 55.

[106] *Ibid.*, p. 63.

[107] H. Richard Niebuhr, "Ernst Troeltsch's Philosophy of Religion," (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Yale University, 1924), p. 263.

[108] Troeltsch, "Dogmatics," p. 17, n. 1.

[109] *Ibid.*, p. 10.

[110] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

[111] *Ibid.*, p. 15.

[112] *Ibid.*

[113] *Ibid.*, p. 16.

[114] *Ibid.*

[115] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

[116] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

[117] The following discussion of Troeltsch's *Die Bedeutung der Geschichtlichkeit Jesu für den Glauben* draws upon Ogletree, pp. 62-73, and Benjamin A. Reist, *Toward a Theology of Involvement* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966), pp. 186-191.

[118] Ogletree, p. 65, citing *Bedeutung*, pp. 33-35.

[119] Troeltsch, *Bedeutung*, p. 50, quoted by Reist, p. 190.

[120] Ogletree, p. 75.

[121] *Ibid.*, p. 43.

[122] Barth, *Protestant Thought*, p. 348.

123This point is well made by Hans W. Frei, "The Theology of H. Richard Niebuhr," *FE*, pp. 110-114.

PART II

THE THEOLOGY OF H. RICHARD NIEBUHR

CHAPTER III

THE CONTEXT AND LIMITATIONS OF THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

The Ontological Situation: Man's Being as Relational

Despite the fact that he generally eschewed formal ontological analysis, Niebuhr comes close to articulating his ontological assumptions in The Responsible Self where he notes that he is addressing himself "to the question about our being in the first place rather than about our doing."[1] It has seemed useful for purposes of clarity to begin our treatment of Niebuhr by giving some attention to this dimension of his thought.

Homo Dialogicus

It is axiomatic to Niebuhr that man exists in a network of relationships with other realities, and therefore his thinking and acting occur in the specific context of his relationships.[2] Niebuhr saw the understanding of the thoroughly relational character of human existence as a relatively late development in man's self-understanding, one which was still in the process of being fully appreciated and explicated. Two other symbols had emerged earlier in man's quest to understand the context of his existence and hence of his obligation. The teleological symbol of man the maker, homo faber, suggested an image of man as the "artificer who constructs things according to an idea and for the sake of an end."[3] Another image was the legal one of man the citizen, homo politicus, where man is understood primarily as living under law. The emerging understanding of man as responsible focuses on the symbol of "man-the-answerer, man engaged in dialogue, man acting in response to action upon him."[4] Niebuhr's ethic of responsibility represents his effort to develop ethical reflection around this image of man as homo dialogicus.[5] Whereas the earlier images understand man as existing primarily in relation to goals or ideals, the symbol of responsibility sees the being of man in terms of his relationships to other selves.

The fundamental personal realities to which the self is related are God and other men. So intricate are the interrelations of self, others, and God "that no member of this triad exists in his true nature without the others, nor can he be known or loved without the others."[6] Moreover, to be related to other men refers not only to men in the present, the social context, but also to men in the past, the historical context. Before we discuss these, however, we must note Niebuhr's acknowledgement of man's fundamental relation to nature.

The Natural Context of Man's Being

Man's being is set in nature which prescribes certain limits for him. As a natural creature man is limited temporally by death, spatially by his physical body and psychologically by his neural-cerebral organism. Man is also dependent on nature for the fulfilment of his needs. As a natural being man's knowledge is rooted in the world of nature and his attempts to grasp that which is beyond that world are limited and relative to his natural life. However, man's natural being is formed and altered by his relationships to other selves, and it is with these relationships that Niebuhr is most concerned.

The Social Context of Man's Being

The social character of human existence is fundamental. "To be a self in the presence of other selves is not a derivative experience but primordial."[7] The very experience of selfhood is dependent upon the acknowledgement of my being as the counterpart of another. Only in relation to another does the self know itself as a self. Moreover, to be a self is to have the capacity of self-transcendence, but this reflexive quality is possible only for a social being. The self becomes an object to itself through dialogue with others.[8] In the I-it relation, the relationship to nature, the I only knows; it does not know itself as known. Only in the I-Thou relation does it know that it knows and therefore knows itself as a self.

All man's knowledge and reflective tools, including his language, logic, values, ideals and laws, are acquired in and conditioned by his social situation. He does not think as a universal being but as a being within a particular matrix of communities and relationships. Indeed, thinking itself is an inner conversation with other persons.

The social self exists in a complex network of relationships which includes relationships to other individuals and to social wholes, but these in turn are related entities. "The social self is never a mere I-Thou self but an I-You self, responding to a Thou that is a member of an interacting community."[9] The other is a representative of a network of social relationships, and as such embodies "something general in the particular."[10] In sum, we are related to society through individuals or social companions who represent particular communities in relation to which we understand ourselves and come to be what we are.

It should be evident from the foregoing that the structure of the self's relationships is always triadic. The self is related to social groups through its relationship to individual members of those groups, and conversely its relationship to individuals includes at least one other element, a community to which both are related. The self is never related to nature simply directly but always through the mediation of a particular society or culture from which the self has acquired certain categories of interpretation. Similarly the self always exists in nature, so that its natural qualifications always enter into its social relationships. The relationship to nature and the relationship to society are not two separate and distinct spheres, but each is always involved in the encounter of the self with the other.

The structure of all man's relationships is triadic, and man's very being might be described as existence within a multiplicity of interrelated triadic relationships. No single triad is constitutive or fully descriptive of one's being, nor is it possible to understand the self apart from its relationships. Niebuhr is not content, however, to note the mere fact of man's triadic existence. He also suggests that man exists in two kinds of triadic relationships that are distinguished not by the nature of the related beings so much as by the mode of their relationship. We shall discuss this important distinction in some detail later in this section.[11]

The Historical Context of Man's Being

The social world in which man's being is set has a past and expects to have a future: it is time-full, historical. The relationship between time and society is a reciprocal one, that is, the sense of time is dependent on and qualified by the social world. Time is essentially the time of my compresence with others: the present is the time of my compresence with others who are present; the past is the time of compresence with others who are no longer present except in memory;[12] and the future is the time of compresence with not-yet present companions.[13]

However, past and future are not simply the no-longer and the not-yet; they are dimensions of the present, or as Niebuhr puts it, "extensions of the present."

> They are the still-present and the already-present. My past is with me now; it is in my present as conscious and unconscious memory; it is here now as habits of behavior, of speech and thought, as ways of cutting up and dividing into shapes and forms the great mass of impressions made on my senses by the energies assailing them from without. My interpersonal past also is with me in all my present meetings with other selves. It is there in all my love and guilt. The self does not leave its past behind as the moving hand of a clock does; its past is inscribed into it more deeply than the past of geologic formations is crystallized in their present form.[14]

The self carries with it in the present its own past and its own past includes the formative influences of its past relationships which themselves reach back into the social-historical past.

As the past is present in memory and impress, so the future is present in anticipation. The self knows itself as directed toward the future, and its understanding of and action in the present include the element of future anticipation.

> As for the future, the not-yet, it is present in my now in expectations and anxieties, in anticipations and commitments, in hopes and fears. To be a self is to live toward the future and to do so not only in the form of purposiveness, but also of expectation, anticipation, anxiety, and hope. Past, present and future are dimensions of the active self's time-fullness. They are always with it from the moment it has realized that 'I am I.' Whatever else the much commented upon continuity of the self in time may mean, this much must be included: the self existing always in a now is one that knows itself as having been and as going into existence and into encounter.[15]

The historicity of the self means also that man's apprehension of himself and his world is formed with the aid of "images and patterns of interpretation, with attitudes of trust and suspicion, accumulated in its biographical and historical past."[16] The self interprets its present experiences largely by means of the language and a priori categories of the historical reason it has inherited from both its social and individual past.

> The responsive, interpreting self is highly conservative not because it loves the past but because its interpretative equipment binds it to the past. The categories of its historical reason largely determine what it can now know and how it will now respond.[17]

Thus the relationship to the past also has a triadic structure. The self is related to the past by virtue of cultural and institutional patterns that have been carried over into the present. One does not have a simple direct relationship to the past as such but experiences the past in the form of experience in the present that contains and mediates elements of the past.

In this connection the question of freedom arises as the question of the extent of the decisiveness of the influence of the social-historical context on the self, or to put the question as Niebuhr does, "the question of the self's ability in its present to change its past and future and to achieve or receive a new understanding of its ultimate historical context."[18] There are two ways to attempt to achieve a relative degree of freedom from the domination of the past: the attempt, never wholly successful, to abandon the past and begin de novo, and the way of reinterpreting the past.[19] The former cannot succeed because man necessarily internalizes his past and can therefore never wholly escape from it. The latter is dependent upon the continual study of history in the light of present symbols, thought-forms, and needs. This reconstruction of the past, both social and individual, can be liberating. Freedom is possible not "through the rejection of the past but through its reinterpretation."[20] Similarly, fresh reinterpretations of future expectations help to free the self in the present, for the self acts "predictively as well as in recollection."[21] Thus while it is a truism for Niebuhr that man is constituted by his personal and social history, it is important that he exercise his freedom and capacity for self-transcendence to be more than a being determined by his social-historical contexts.

The Ultimate Context of Man's Being

The social and historical contexts of the self are essential relationships through which to understand how the self becomes what it is and how it comes to think and act in certain ways. But these are not sufficient to understand the radical action by which the self exists at all in its uniqueness and particularity and through which it is held in existence.

> The radical action by which I am and by which I am present with this body, this mind, this emotional equipment, this religion, is not identifiable with any of the finite actions that constitute the particular elements in physical, mental, personal existence.[22]

The self is relatively dependent upon its social and historical situation, but it is absolutely dependent on the power of Being, "the power by which I am and we are."[23] Men may and do try to ignore the relationship of absolute dependence or they may interpret it as inimical, but they cannot in the final analysis step out of it. In either of these negative responses they are related although in a relationship of distrust and unfaith.

The nature of man's relationship to the Ultimate context of his being, then, takes the form of either trust or distrust, which although it is mediated by the self's proximate relationships, is a personal and individual response. The self's fundamental attitude of trust or distrust of Being qualifies its interpretations and reactions to finite agencies. Moreover, the being which the self becomes is profoundly qualified by its basic orientation toward its ultimate context. For example, the self may achieve wholeness as a self by understanding all acts upon it as belonging ultimately to the one Agency beyond all the many expressions.

To understand God's action in all finite acts is to imply that God's being is not wholly discontinuous from the world, but to suggest less is to invite ontological dualism. God for

Niebuhr is the ground of history, the Being of beings, "the structure in things,"[24] the universal in every particular. This is never more clearly and succinctly stated than in the following statement from a 1932 exchange with his brother.

> For my brother God is outside the historical processes, so much so that he charges me with faith in a miracle-working deity which interferes occasionally, sometimes brutally, sometimes redemptively, in this history. But God, I believe, is always in history; he is the structure in things, the source of all meaning, the 'I am that I am,' that which is that it is. He is the rock against which we beat in vain, that which bruises and overwhelms us when we seek to impose our wishes contrary to his, upon him. That structure of the universe, that creative will, can no more be said to interfere brutally in history than the violated laws of my organism can be said to interfere brutally with my life if they make me pay the cost of my violation. That structure of the universe, that will of God, does bring war and depression upon us when we bring it upon ourselves, for we live in the kind of world which visits our iniquities upon us and our children, no matter how much we pray and desire that it be otherwise. . . . But this same structure in things which is our enemy is our redeemer; "it means intensely and means good" -- not the good which we desire, but the good which we would desire if we were good and really wise. History is not a perennial tragedy but a road to fulfilment and that fulfilment requires the tragic outcome of every self-assertion, for it is a fulfilment which can only be designated as "love."[25]

Man is involved in the relationship with Ultimate Being in all that he is and in all that occurs. It is the inescapable relationship. To have affirmed anything short of this would have seemed to Niebuhr to have compromised the sovereignty of God and to have separated the spheres of nature and of grace, creation and redemption. Here he clearly belongs to the tradition of Augustine, Calvin, and Edwards, as he was fully aware.

Again, the relationship to God has a triadic structure; it always involves a third party, which we may designate at this point simply as history. Man's relationship to God occurs in the medium of history through the mediation of historical events and persons.

Finally, it is essential to note that if man's relationship to God is a personal relationship, God's being is necessarily personal being.

> If the cornerstone of Christian philosophy is the conviction that "there is one God and this God is Being," [a reference to a statement by Etienne Gilson] the cornerstone of Christian as of Jewish and all radical monotheist confidence and loyalty is that the one God who is Being is an "I," or like an "I," who is faithful as only selves are faithful.[26]

This affirmation is not theoretical speculation nor is it the result of rational reflection; it arises out of God's self-revelation personally apprehended and affirmed not for theoretic but for existential-ethical purposes. The ultimate context as well as the proximate contexts of human existence are personal; man's being is personal being set in the midst of other personal beings to whom he is related in a complex network grounded in ultimate Being itself.

The Self in the Order of Being

Niebuhr's understanding of the relational character of man's being raises the question of whether the self is "exhaustively constituted by its relations" or whether it is "an actual entity . . . and therefore an irreducible 'term,' a 'substantive,' etc., in the *ordo essendi*."[27] The fact that Niebuhr eschews metaphysical analysis in his thinking together with the fact that he always begins with the self in its relationships rather than the self as it is in itself can lead one to assume that he reduces the self to its relations. However, such is not the case, for Niebuhr affirms the existence of the self as a primary cognition.

> I am, and I am I. That "I am," and "I am I" here, now, bring to my awareness a radical deed which I cannot identify with any of the specific actions that have constituted the elements of my body. . . . Neither can I identify the radical action by which I am, with any of the actions that have constituted this mind, which is so closely related to the self that with Descartes I want to say: "I think, therefore I am." Nor is the action by which I am identifiable with that series of actions by which those emotions have come into being, which make the external observer regard me as a complex of feelings, a system of emotions, a temperament, an attitude, and which make me to tend to say: "I feel, therefore I am." In all these statements the "I" has been posited in the premise. My self-existence is not deduced from something that is more evidently the case than that I am. There is no way of moving from the impersonal statements that thinking is going on, or that living is in process, or that feeling occurs, to the conclusion that therefore I am. Only if I posit the self can I refer this thinking, living, feeling, to myself.[28]

The self is presupposed in all its relations with other beings. Niebuhr points out that the affirmation that we know ourselves as subjects only in the presence of another does not mean that we exist only in the presence of another.[29] Dialogical relationships would be undercut if the parties to the dialogue did not have some self-identity apart from and prior to the relationship. The self might respond but it could not be responsible.

Julian Hartt lists three characteristics of its ontological situation that the self apprehends in a primary cognition: "existence, finitude, personhood."[30] In the long quotation above Niebuhr has affirmed the self's existence as a primary cognition.

He also affirms the self's primary knowledge of its finitude in terms of its awareness of its determinateness "in the thusness and so-ness of existence,"[31] and of its absolute dependence. Moreover for Niebuhr "I know that I am a person" for "I apprehend myself as one apprehending another and as being apprehended by another."[32]

The self cannot be reduced to a nexus of relations but exists in the order of being as a "finite, terminal individual."[33] There is a being which enters into relationships through which it becomes a self. In other words, the finite, terminal individual is shaped by its relationships; the self exists in the essential order as a being in the process of becoming. Niebuhr's ontology of the self is a dynamic, historical ontology.[34]

The Modes or Structures of Relatedness

Man's relationality is so fundamental to his existence that it is necessary to speak of it as belonging to the structure of his being. It is not enough, however, to describe the context of man's being in terms of the entities to which he is related; we must also take note of the two fundamental modes in which Niebuhr sees all man's relationships occurring. Although these modes or structures of relationship are epistemological in their implications, Niebuhr seems to understand them as inherent in the very being of man, and for that reason it is possible to discuss them under the category of ontology.

In the first place, man may be related to nature and to other beings *impersonally*. In an impersonal relation the other, whether it is a personal being or a natural entity, is an object, a thing. The mode of relationship is I-it, rather than I-Thou.[35] The purpose of such a relationship is usually noetic knowledge, which is the result of an active mind observing and describing inert, passive objects. This mode is essentially the Kantian pure theoretical reason.

The structure of impersonal relationships is triadic; it always involves a third element which in some way mediates between the other two parties. Thus, one is related to nature at least partly through the mediation of the social world which provides the tools for the interpretation of nature. One may be related impersonally to society through the medium of the social psychologist who interprets human behavior in terms of environmental causation or to historical events via the historian who seeks to understand "what really happened" as part of a nexus of causal relations. In any event, the point is simply that we are never related purely as an "I" to an "it" but always through intermediaries as well.

The second mode of relationship is *personal* in nature. Here the related parties are subjects acting upon each other as persons who not only think but also express feelings, make commitments, and espouse values. The relationship is not primarily noetic but is characterized by interpersonal trust and loyalty. This mode is of course the I-Thou relationship, and it is akin to the practical reason.

Again the structure is triadic, but the third term is or includes a cause to which the other members of the triad are loyal. For example, as a teacher, I am never simply related to my students or they to me; we are both bound together by our loyalty to the cause of truth or to the discipline in which we are engaged. Our commitment to this cause is the basis of our trust of each other as faithful witnesses to the truth. Similarly, the patriot is related to his fellow citizens through their common bond of loyalty to the nation's cause.

Niebuhr notes that this third reality in the personal relational structure has a double character. "On the one hand it is something personal; on the other it contains within itself again a reference to something that transcends it or to which it refers."[36] The nation is not only a community of persons living and dead; it is also the ideals or values or "way of life" for which that community stands and which it represents. The cause of truth to which teacher and student are related is both the community of learning and the values which that community represents.

It is evident that man exists simultaneously in a multiplicity of both kinds of relationships. He is continually involved in impersonal triadic relationships on which he is dependent for his very sustenance as well as for growth in knowledge of the natural and human world. He is dependent on personal relationships for values, meaning and purpose without which he could not live humanly.

Moreover, it is the intent or interest of the self or selves rather than the nature of the object itself that determines the mode of the relationship. What in one context is an impersonal relationship may in another be a personal relationship.

So the social scientist reports dispassionately about a community that may be an object of loyalty to another. Similarly, there is overlapping between the two structures as when scientists committed to impersonal knowledge of nature rely on each other to keep faith with their common cause.

It was apparently the possibility of the interrelation of the two modes of relatedness that led Niebuhr away from his earlier use of the simpler distinction between the pure and practical reason to this later personal-impersonal distinction which he seemed to feel offered a better basis for the unity of the self.[37] He was concerned to find a model that would provide for the ethical or valuing elements in man's knowing and the noetic elements in his more personal existence. He characteristically points to the element of interpersonal trust involved in most if not all knowledge, and to the fact that trust is often at least partly dependent on knowledge of the other's trustworthiness (e.g., in other situations).

The essential distinction drawn here is fundamental to Niebuhr's theology and particularly to his understanding of faith and its relationship to history, as we shall note more fully in subsequent chapters.

The ontological situation defines the context of man's being, and it also implies the epistemological limits within which his thinking takes place. For theology those implications are twofold; theological reflection is relative to and limited by one's place in the socio-temporal world; and it is relative to and limited by one's religious relationship. We must now explicate these epistemological implications of Niebuhr's ontology.

The Historical Context of Theological Reflection

Historical Relativism

Man is dependent on his social-historical relationships for his knowledge and his tools of reflection. However, since there is no one universal social-historical situation, human understanding is necessarily relative to the particular matrix of relationships of a given historical time and place. Man's social-historical situation thoroughly affects both the content of his knowledge and the mode of his reasoning, which is historical reason.

> Not with timeless ideas, recollected in Platonic recall of the soul's participations in the eternal; not with timeless laws of never-changing nature or of a pure human, unhistorical reason, does the self come to its present encounters. . . . The categories of its historical reason largely determine what it can know and how it will now respond.[38]

Historical relativism includes two closely related facets. The first is the relativism of the historical object, and the second is the relativism of the subject. The relativism of the object refers to the fact that ideas and events must be understood as relative to and conditioned by their social-historical context; they must be seen as reflecting the situation in which they occurred. Thus Jesus' teachings must be understood in the light of the context in which he lived including the eschatological views of his day, the religious and political situation, and the language and thought-forms which were part of his milieu. This of course is the familiar hermeneutical understanding articulated by modern historiography. For theology the relativism of the historical object calls into question the traditional claims of the universal validity of the event which faith considers normative; we must discuss Niebuhr's response to this challenge momentarily.

The relativism of the subject refers to the fact that every man occupies a particular standpoint in time and space, and that standpoint largely determines the nature of his perceptions and interpretations of experience. There is no universal perspective from which to understand an historical event or any other aspect of reality; there are only particular historical standpoints which influence not only what we think but how we think, our thought-processes and interpretative tools as well.

> Our historical relativism affirms the historicity of the subject even more than that of the object; man, it points out, is not only in time but time is in man. Moreover and more significantly, the time that is in man is not abstract but particular and concrete; it is not a general category of time but rather the time of a definite society with distinct language, economic and political relations, religious faith and social organization.[39]

All that we perceive is shaped by our particular social-historical perspective. A perspective, it should be noted, includes many factors. One may, for example, be a twentieth century English-speaking Western Christian man; all of these factors are part of his historically-conditioned standpoint.

Niebuhr believed that the awareness that "the spatio-temporal point of view of an observer enters into his knowledge of reality"[40] plays as decisive a role in our present thinking as the discoveries of idealism and of evolutionary thought in previous generations. It has taught us that our "metaphysics, logic, ethics, and theology" are as relative to our social-historical situation as are our "economics, politics and rhetoric."[41] We now understand such great conceptions, once thought by the rationalist to be eternally true, as "'the natural rights of men,' 'the natural order,' 'the system of natural liberty,' 'the divine right of kings,' 'the law of supply and demand,' . . . [to contain] elements which are thoroughly relative to historical background, to a will to believe, and to the specific interests of certain social groups."[42] Kant's conception of duty once viewed as "the rational essence of universal moral experience appears to the historical view to be essence only of any practical reason which has been educated, as Kant's had been, in a society in which the Judaic-Christian tradition is predominant."[43]

In theology historical relativism means that what one generation of theologians and philosophers took to be innate ideas are now understood as "innate" only to those who occupy the same place in history and culture rather than to all men. The ideas rationalism took for granted as universal truths of reason are now known as granted to men through the medium of history. The value scale thought by other theologians to be universally valid is seen as the values of a particular socio-economic-historical community. The claim of present dogmatic theology to express immutable truth is also subject to question for the same reasons.[44]

> There does not seem then to be any apparent possibility of escape from the dilemma of historical relativism for any type of theology. The historical point of view of the observer must be taken into consideration in every

> case since no observer can get out of history into a realm beyond time-space; if reason is to operate at all it must be content to work as an historical reason.[45]

The acceptance of a thoroughgoing historical relativism need not, however, have negative implications for theology as Niebuhr saw it. Theology's task is always to communicate faith's vision of truth to each new historical epoch in the language and thought-forms of the time and with the aid of man's new self-knowledge. Just as theology was able to work effectively within the limitations of empirical and critical philosophy, so Niebuhr saw theology's acceptance of the historical limitations of reason as "the prelude to faithful critical work in history and in historically apprehended experience."[46]

The Implications of Historical Relativism for Theology

One of the positive implications of historical relativism for faith and reflection upon faith is that it helps to safeguard the sovereignty of God. The awareness of the limited and partial nature of all human knowledge and enterprises points in a kind of _via negativa_ to the Absolute beyond all the relative. One of Niebuhr's persistent themes is the adumbration of the subtle forms of man's tendency to idolatry, understood as absolutizing a relative or finite reality, value, or truth-claim. In the "Preface" to _The Meaning of Revelation_ he wrote of three convictions underlying the book, of which the second "is that the great source of evil in life is the absolutizing of the relative, which in Christianity takes the form of substituting religion, revelation, church or Christian morality for God."[47] In a real sense historical relativism is a corollary of belief in a metahistorical Absolute. As Niebuhr puts it: "Just because faith knows of an absolute standpoint it can therefore accept the relativity of the believer's situation and knowledge."[48]

Methodologically, historical relativism means that theology must start from within the faith of the historic Christian community in its thinking about God and man. The relativity of the subject means that no one occupies a universal position; one speaks from within a particular historical standpoint and for the theologian that standpoint can only be the Christian faith. "Theology, then, must begin in Christian history and with Christian history because it has no other choice."[49] Theology works within the triad of self, the historic Christian community, and God.

There is no universal religious experience; all religious experience is historically qualified. Similarly there is no universal form of faith; there are only particular historical faiths.

> I cannot think about God's relation to man in the abstract. The historical qualification of my relation to him is inescapable. I cannot presume to think as a Jew or a Mohammedan would think about God, though I recognize that they are thinking about the same God about whom I think. Nor can I presume to rise above these specific relations to God in which I have been placed so as to think simply and theistically about God. There is no such being, or source of being, surely, as a Christian God (though there may be Christian idols); But there is a Christian relation to God and I cannot abstract from that, as no Jew or Mohammedan can abstract from a Jewish or Muslim relation.[50]

A theology that accepts the limitations of the perspective of Christian history must be a confessional theology. It will not claim to offer a universal religious method or to speak a universal religious language, nor will it attempt to prove the superiority of Christianity to other faiths. It will confess only what it knows and what it has experienced as true within its own perspective. We shall discuss more fully Niebuhr's confessionalism after dealing with his "religious relativism."[51]

Although it is limited to its standpoint, a confessional theology can proceed with confidence in the reality of what it perceives from that standpoint. Niebuhr has been criticized for using the term "relativism" rather than "relational" because, as he himself notes, of the former's connotations of subjectivism and skepticism.[52] Nevertheless, the term was well chosen since Niebuhr uses it to suggest two closely related meanings. On the one hand, relativism refers to perspectivism, the particular point of view of the subject; on the other hand, it means limitations, the restrictions of any particular point of view. In neither of these senses does relativism imply subjectivism or skepticism; it casts doubt only on any claim to have the one universally valid approach. Theology can be objectively relativistic.

> It is not evident that the man who is forced to confess that his view of things is conditioned by the standpoint he occupies must doubt the reality of what he sees. It is not apparent that one who knows that his concepts are not universal must also doubt that they are concepts of the universal, or that one who understands how all his experience is historically mediated must believe that nothing is mediated through history.[53]

Where the issue is the historical relativity of the subject, Niebuhr's position might be termed "perspectival objectivism."[54] The point here is simply that what is seen from a particular historically conditioned angle of vision is not thereby "subjective" in the sense that it is merely a modification of the individual's consciousness rather than referring to something that exists independently of the subject. It is often noted that we constantly view physical objects from an angle so that we see, for example, a round coin in the shape of an ellipse. We correct and complete our image of the coin by bringing other perspectival images to mind. While the analogy is extremely limited in its application to theology, it indicates several points. It suggests, first, that one can and must take appropriate measures to test one's views by imaginatively adopting other perspectives from which to perceive the same object.[55] Second, the analogy suggests that all our knowledge is perspectival and requires some kind of "animal faith in the reality of the objects"[56] in question. Historical relativism requires "something of an act of faith" which "is inevitable and justifies itself or is justified by its fruits."[57] Relativism need not mean subjectivism any more than any other epistemological position, for all knowledge is conditioned by the standpoint of the knower and, indeed, a standpoint is the condition of knowing. All knowing is a function of the relationship between the knower and what is known. Niebuhr's relativism is "objective relativism."

> If we are confined by our situation to the knowledge of God which is possible to those who live in Christian history we are not thereby confined to a knowledge of Christian history but in faith can think with Christianity about God, and in Christianity have experience of the being who is the beginning and the end of this historic faith.[58]

Where the issue is the relativity of the historical object, Niebuhr's position does not involve skepticism, for the truth of an idea is not and cannot be dependent on the historically-conditioned forms in which it comes to light. The idea of political equality, for example, may have emerged as a result of the convergence of several historical-cultural conditions and the various forms it takes may reflect those historical situations, but the idea itself expresses a truth that transcends the cultural forms in which it is embodied.[59]

Historical relativism does not imply subjectivism, for it is the apprehension from a particular perspective of that which exists independently of the knower; nor does it involve skepticism but simply partiality and limitation. Relativism defines the historical perspective of theology, and it restricts the truth-claims of theology to something less than universality; it does not negate or invalidate what is grasped for those who share its standpoint.

Other standpoints than that of historic faith have often been suggested as primary for theology. Against those who argue that the realm of nature is the locus of God's revelation, Niebuhr maintains that nature is so understood only on the basis of the faith originally mediated to us through history. Nature may mean something entirely different and utterly devoid of God to someone regarding it from the standpoint of another history and another faith.[60]

Niebuhr reminds those who suggest inner religious experience as fundamental that their interpretation of such experience is dependent upon a particular religious history; from another point of view inner religious experience may be understood as mere "psychic phenomena."

Even the Scriptures cannot be decisive in themselves apart from the perspective of the history of the Church which has understood them as pointing to God's revelation. However, as the external record, the chief documentary evidence of the historical origins of Christian faith, the Scriptures play a significant role as a text for the interpretation of the meaning of historic faith.[61]

The relationship to history, then, is more fundamental for faith and faith's reflecting arm, theology, than are these other realities which depend upon historical events for their illumining character. The primacy of history, it should be noted, is not unique to the modern age, although the form of that relationship has certain unique elements. The Church has always been compelled to state its faith in historical terms. "The only creed which has been able to maintain itself in the church with any approach to universality consists for the most part of statements about events."[62]

The relationship of faith and theological reflection to history, rather than being a burdensome thing, should be liberating. The modern emphasis on the historical nature of man's world has served to recall the church to the historical method in which it was born.

> From the point of view of historical beings we can speak only about that which is also in our time and which is seen through the medium of our history. We are in history as the fish is in water and what we mean by the revelation of God can be indicated only as we point through the medium in which we live.[63]

The Hermeneutical Task of Theology

A theology that takes seriously the relativity of the historical object as well as the historical nature of Christian faith is a hermeneutical theology that continually moves between the poles of historic faith and present understanding, translating the one into the thought-forms and symbols of the other. Theology is present dialogue with the past and, in anticipation, with the future as well. In this sense, "historical relativism also means relevance to history."[64]

Niebuhr exemplified in his own theological work this polar relationship to history. His dialogue with the history of Christian thought is evident in all his works, especially in Christ and Culture and The Kingdom of God in America.[65] These works are historical studies of the first order because they represent a creative contemporary approach to the material in the midst of being faithful to the sources. There can be little question that Niebuhr came to his own theological position on the basis of his continual reflection on the history of Christian expression.[66] Consistent with his practical ethical concerns, Niebuhr emphasizes the study of the past not as an end in itself but as a means of illuminating the present.

> Tradition has assumed a new significance for Protestants in a period dominated by the historical understanding of human life. . . . The church has begun to pay a new attention to its tradition. It sees it not as a dead thing once and for all given for acceptance or rejection, but as living history constantly being renewed, rethought and re-searched for meanings relevant to existing men.[67]

The task of a hermeneutical theology is not only to understand the past in its own terms and context, but since the past lives in the present its meaning must be communicated in terms that are meaningful today. We interpret the past in the light of present experience and contemporary problems. So Niebuhr speaks of the present necessity of the "resymbolization of the message and the life of faith in the One God."[68]

The Religious Context: Niebuhr's Theocentric Relativism

The nature of man's relationship to God is faith, and it is only from the perspective of faith that God is known. "One can speak and think significantly about God only from the point of view of faith in him."[69] Niebuhr notes that the roots of this "religious relativism" go back very far in Jewish and Christian history, but it is Protestantism that has made it most explicit. Luther in The Large Catechism asked what it means to have a god and answered that "trust and faith of the heart alone make both God and idol. . . . For the two, faith and God, hold close together. Whatever then thy heart clings to . . . and relies upon, that is properly thy god."[70]

The nineteenth century had further developed the "faith method" in theology, and though he was critical of Schleiermacher, Ritschl, and their followers for their failure to apply their initial insight consistently, Niebuhr remained firmly committed to their empirical starting point.

> The enduring contribution of empirical theology, from Schleiermacher to Macintosh, lies in its insistence on the fact that knowledge of God is available only in religious relation to him.[71]

Religious Relativism and the Object of Theology

The affirmation that knowledge of God is not possible except from the standpoint of faith has several implications for theology. First, that God and faith belong together is not only a statement about the mode or context of theological reflection; it also refers to the object and content of theology. It is to say that knowledge about the objective reality, God, cannot be abstracted from the subjective activity of faith, and vice versa. The object of theology is God and man in relation.

> What is known and knowable in theology is God in relation to self and neighbor, and self and neighbor in relation to God. This complex of related beings is the object of theology.[72]

Theology cannot claim to have access to the aseity of God or to God in isolation. On the other hand, theology is not limited to a knowledge of faith, but in faith is given a genuine apprehension of that objective reality present to faith. Niebuhr's thought is relational, but it is also objective. However, it is not the task of theology to reflect on the being of God but on the deity of God, which is to say, "God as present to faith."[73] The qualification "God as present to faith," that is, to man in faith, means that theology examines the meaning of God for human existence. "The proper study of mankind is God and man-before-God in their interrelation."[74]

Theological discourse necessarily abstracts one term of the relation from the other terms with the result that it must guard against the tendency to think of its object as either man or God, rather than their complex interrelation.

> We can only speak in succession of what appears in contemporaneousness; in discourse we must abstract relations, such as love, from the terms related and the terms from each other, so that we are always in danger of speaking of God without reference to the being he loves and that loves him; of speaking about religion or love of God as distinct from ethics or love of neighbor.[75]

Relational method in theology, then, means that theology is reflection on the complex personal triad of self, neighbor, and God. It is discourse about the meaning and value of persons to each other as a result of their triadic relationship or interaction. (More specifically, theology deals with the meaning of God for man since the meaning of man for God is outside the bounds of human experience.) Relationalism also suggests the nature of theological knowledge. The truth with which theology deals is personal relational truth, rather than impersonal truth. The latter is a relation between thought and things and its antithesis is error or ignorance. Personal truth refers to the relation of trust and loyalty between selves and its antithesis is lie or deception. Personal truth is not, however, purely immediate, for our knowledge of selves is the result of their disclosure of themselves to us in historic acts in which they demonstrate their faithfulness and trustworthiness.

Religious Relativism as Objective Relativism

Niebuhr understood the subjectivistic risk of affirming the faith method in theology. He noted that Schleiermacher's faith-theology had deteriorated into a "'faithology' or a 'religionology.'"[76] It seemed to Niebuhr that the danger was inherent in Protestantism since, if man is justified by faith, it is a simple matter to confuse the *sola fide* with the God of faith and to ascribe saving power to the former understood as a qualification of human experience.

At the same time Niebuhr wanted to avoid what he considered to be the errors of Barth's over-reaction to theological subjectivism. If Schleiermacher had failed to provide sufficiently for the reality of God's otherness, Barthian objectivism neglected the human element.

> The method which this theology uses to define its position is fundamentally inimical to its realistic interest. If the nineteenth century, beginning with the subject, could discover no way that leads from subject to object, from man to God, then this twentieth century theology beginning with the object fails to find a way to the subject, from God to man. If an anthropocentric mode of thought tried to define religion within the limits of humanity then this purely theocentric approach tends to present a faith within the limits of deity.[77]

Niebuhr understood crisis theology to be caught on the horns of the dilemma produced by an over-emphasis on the "infinite qualitative difference" between God and man. On the one hand, it had reduced all human religious experience and reason to "purely subjective processes," leaving no "point of contact" between God and man and resulting in an "agnosticism in which God remains forever unknown."[78] On the other hand, Barth's attempt to correct this problem by insisting on the entrance of the wholly transcendent God into human life by means of a revelation which stands over against all human experience and history can only be acceptable as "pure dogma. In effect, therefore, the theology of crisis is not so much a realism as a complete dualism which tends to become a dogmatism."[79] As late as 1960, Niebuhr could write that Barth seems

> to me to have gone back to orthodoxy as right teaching, right doctrine, and to faith as _fides_, as assent; [tending] . . . toward the definition of Christianity as the true religion, and otherwise toward the assertion of the primacy of ideas over personal relations.[80]

Niebuhr therefore sought to develop a method that would insure the objectivity and sovereignty of God without transcending the epistemological limits he felt to be inherent in theology, a method that was theocentric without being dogmatic and authoritarian yet without negating human religious and historical experience. Such a theology would take creation and redemption as seriously as eschatology, yet without confusing Creator and creature, Redeemer and redeemed. The result was a relational theological method that maintained the priority and independence of the sovereign God through an _objective_ relativism and a _theocentric_ value theology.

Niebuhr believed that the subjectivistic tendency was not inherent in the faith method. It does not follow that because God is known only in faith, that only faith is known. Schleiermacher's difficulty did not lie in his method, but in the fact that he allowed his thinking to turn "away from God to religious feelings and tended to make the religious consciousness the object of confidence."[81] This inversion was probably due to Schleiermacher's apologetic interest.

Relational objectivism in theology affirms that God is present to faith just as surely as objects are present to empirical experience.

> [God] is the name for that objective being, that other-than-the-self, which men have before them as they _believe_ rather than as they see, hear, feel, or even as they reason.[82]

Moreover, by insisting on the initiative of God in revelation Niebuhr insures God's independent reality. A revelational theology in which God confronts man with himself in the medium of history is Niebuhr's defense against subjectivism. Such a theology, to remain true to its initial insight, will focus on the sovereign God who reveals himself, and not simply on the human effects of revelation. For revelation means that faith is not a human means of access to God, since faith itself is given to man in revelation. Thus Niebuhr combines the empirical faith method of nineteenth century theology with the revelational theology of the twentieth in order to assure both the objectivity of God and his relationship to man.

Theocentric Value Theology

The second major implication of religious relativism is that religious knowledge belongs to the valuational mode of knowing. Theology must begin in faith because God is known as God in no other way. That is, the Being variously called the Absolute, the One, Being Itself, has the value of God only in the relationship of faith; as Luther said, faith creates deity.

> Religious knowledge has been shown to be unique, and this uniqueness has been shown to be due to the fact that it is a type of value-knowledge or valuation -- as, indeed, all knowledge probably is. The knowledge of God, it has been pointed out, is not equivalent to the knowledge of doctrine or of a First Cause or a Designer. And its dissimilarity to theological or metaphysical knowledge is due not only to its immediacy -- which may be questioned -- but to its character as knowledge of a being having value of a certain sort.[83]

By God we mean the "center of value,"[84] that on which man depends for his own value and meaning and hence that which values him. Niebuhr does not deny -- indeed his conversionist theology presupposes -- that the Being faith knows as God can be known by other means as the Power of Being, or as "the nature of things," or "fate," or "reality,"[85] but such knowledge is not religious knowledge and its object is not God. As an event may be known by a historian without acknowledgement of its goodness, or as a painting may be seen by a chemist without recognition of its beauty, so the divine may be known "by philosophy, history or natural science without knowledge of its deity."[86] Niebuhr's relational value theory insists that God is God (i.e., has the value of deity) only as he is God-for-us.

The question of God, then, for the theologian is not the metaphysical problem of whether a Supreme Being exists, but rather the question of what has the value of deity for man. Niebuhr's relational value theory understands value as a function of the relationship of beings. This is to pose the question of God as the question of whether I am related to the principle of being in such a way that He is also the source and center of value for me. The problem of God "comes to us as an eminently practical problem, a problem of human existence and destiny, of the meaning of human life in general and of the life of self and its community in particular."[87] It is a personal rather than an impersonal matter.[88]

The question arises as to whether this relational view limits or negates the freedom of God. Niebuhr does not think so, because God holds the initiative in his relations with man. In revelation God is the Other who confronts man and elicits his response of faith (trust/loyalty). If it is true that faith creates deity, it is no less true that deity creates faith; there is no simple rational solution to this paradox. God's freedom is secured by the fact that his action is prior to and independent of man.

The error value theologies have made in the past has been their identification of God with some instrumental value. They have assumed that men have insight into "absolutely valid values" apart from and prior to their knowledge of God but which are "in some way determinative of God."[89] This was Ritschl's problem.

> Ritschl approached God not from the point of view of Christian faith which values God as infinitely superior to man and the source of whatever real value man himself has, but rather from the standpoint of man's confidence in his own worth as superior to nature.[90]

Ritschl was correct in understanding the relation of man to God as a value-relation, but he was wrong in positing the prior value-relation of man in opposition to nature and making God an instrument of man's self-confidence as a super-natural being. Thus was Ritschl guilty of inverting faith into an anthropocentric affirmation of human value rather than the theocentric affirmation of God's deity. Niebuhr again saw the apologetic interest of the defense of Christianity as the basis of Ritschl's error.

Anthropocentrism is not inherent in a valuational theological method, however. "It is possible and necessary to interpret religion as an affair of valuation without assuming that such valuation must or can be made on the basis of a previously established standard of values."[91] To safeguard its theocentrism, theology must insist that faith does not bring to the God relationship certain prior values to which that relationship must conform. Monotheistic faith "no more begins by asking what God is good for than humanistic or vitalistic ethics begins with the inquiry what man or life is good for."[92] Rather, the value which deity fulfils is given in the encounter with deity, in revelation. At the same time, that encounter does not occur apart from man's ontological situation.

> The value of deity would appear . . . to be quite independent of human desire and the consciousness of need, but not independent of the human constitution and its actual need. The situation may be stated positively in the terms of Augustine, that God has created us toward himself and that our souls are restless until they find their rest in him.[93]

God is not worshipped as God because he guarantees the validity of some human value, but that does not mean that the fundamental need of man for deity is not inherent in the structure of human existence. Niebuhr recognizes a kind of "religious a priori" here. He states it more concretely when he writes of the universality of the phenomenon of faith. All men live by faith in a center of value, a god, from which they derive their sense of meaning and purpose to life, their assurance that life is worth living, and hence their own value and dignity as selves.[94] The universality of faith in all its forms seems to Niebuhr to suggest that the human need for God is inherent in the structure of man.

In all henotheistic forms of faith the value of god is that which fulfils some express human desire. However, in revelation

> the "needs" themselves are contingent upon and hence to be understood only through criteria established within the framework of the divine-human relation. In that case the value of deity coincides with the value that is realized in the relationship.[95]

In terms of Niebuhr's conversionist motif, we can say that man's natural faith, his inherent need for a center of value, is transformed into radical faith, his need for an Absolute center of value, by revelation. God's deity and man's need for God are structurally compatible, but we recognize this compatibility and are able to participate in it only because of God's revelation and its resulting transformation of our natural human values. Therefore the content of revelation corresponds to man's needs; that is, there is a coincidence between what is revealed and what man needs to have revealed, between the quality of God's deity "and the valuation realized in the divine human relation."[96]

> The content of revelation is not the self-disclosure of an unknown being, but the unveiling of the value of a known being. What is revealed in revelation is not a being as such, but rather its deity-value, not that it is, but that it "loves us," "judges us," that it makes life worth living.[97]

Faith as valuation is relativistic, but it is objective relativism or theocentric relativism since the relationship with God is itself the source of man's affirmation of His deity.

From this discussion it can be seen that theology has no choice but to begin with faith and in particular with Christian faith. The choice is not between a neutral, disinterested and value-free "objectivity" on the one hand and commitment to the God of revelation on the other; the alternatives are between perspectives.

> If the historical limitations of all thought about God demand that theology begin consciously with and in an historical community, its limitations as an inquiry into the nature of the object of faith require it to begin in faith and therefore in a particular faith, since there is no other kind. Because God and faith belong together the standpoint of the Christian theologian must be in the faith of the Christian community, directed toward the God of Jesus Christ. Otherwise his standpoint will be that of some other community with another faith and another god. There is no neutral standpoint and no faithless situation from which approach can be made to that which is inseparable from faith.[98]

The radical nature of God's sovereignty limits all knowledge of Him to believing experience.

The Historical-Religious Limitations of Theology: Niebuhr's Confessionalism

The acceptance of historical and religious relativism means that theology's claims and assertions are limited to the context of historic faith. Because God is known only from within the standpoint of a particular historically mediated faith, Christian theology can only speak from within the historic faith of the Christian community. Its reasoning will not only proceed from that context, it will also be directed to the self-understanding and self-criticism of the Christian community. It will relate "the story of our lives," "what we have seen and heard," in the language and symbols meaningful to the present Christian community.

> We can proceed only by stating in simple, confessional form what has happened to us in our community, how we came to believe, how we reason about things and what we see from our point of view.[99]

Therefore, a confessional theology will refrain from laying claim to universality and from presuming to have absolutely valid knowledge of the Absolute. It will recognize the limitations of its own apprehension and will necessarily be open to the possibility of truth in other apprehensions for those of other historical communities. It will claim only that the truth it knows is true for its historical-religious situation.

Moreover, a confessional theology will not attempt to proclaim the superiority of Christianity over other faiths lest it become guilty of the idolatry of substituting "the sovereignty of Christian religion for the sovereignty of the God of Christian faith."[100] Niebuhr was particularly concerned that theology not be defensive or self-justifying. Throughout his writings he expressed "the conviction that self-defense is the most prevalent source of error in all thinking and perhaps especially in theology and ethics."[101]

Theologically defensiveness implies a rejection of justification by grace since it involves a subtle form of self-justification. A confessional theology could not of course eliminate the human tendency to self-justification, but it would be a safeguard against theology committing this error.

Consistent with his confessional stance, Niebuhr refused to argue for the universal validity of the Christian apprehension of God, and hence he could not insist on the universality of Jesus Christ. Confessionalism can only affirm the centrality of Jesus Christ for the Christian.

While confessionalism would seem to place severe restrictions upon theology, Niebuhr believed that it was essential for religious as well as for epistemological reasons. The alternative to confessionalism was the assertion of the validity of Christian faith beyond its own context, and that would be to absolutize a relative perspective and also to limit the freedom of God to reveal himself in other ways than through Jesus Christ.

While appreciating the importance of guarding against the absolutizing of a relative viewpoint, John Cobb has challenged Niebuhr's confessionalism on the ground that it cannot be held consistently. Cobb suggests that the logic of Niebuhr's and any theology grounded in God's revelation of himself as Person must push it beyond the limits of the confessional stance. For, Cobb reasons, God is either person or else he is not; there seems to be no alternative for Niebuhr but to affirm that on this point Christianity is right and other faiths who deny God's personhood are wrong.[102]

There are several possible answers to Cobb's critique. The first is simply to re-assert Niebuhr's position that if we allow some human affirmation the status of exclusive truth, we risk idolatry. Niebuhr notes that even a revelational theology is not exempt from the temptation to absolutize its apprehensions. The propositions that result from revelation are human constructs or symbols and as such are inescapably relative.

Another possible way of answering Cobb's argument is to suggest that his logic may be caught in the limitations of the Western rational tradition. There may be a sense in which it is possible to affirm that God is both person and yet impersonal, that the category of personality as we understand it does not exhaust the being of God. While it is meaningful for Western man to affirm God's personhood, it may be more appropriate for Eastern man to understand Him in impersonal terms. Perhaps we can suggest that God so far transcends the human idea of selfhood that it may be possible to speak of Him as impersonal so long as that statement is understood as a partial truth and as relative to a culture where that aspect of God's being is more meaningful.

Finally, it may be that what Niebuhr intended to affirm by his confessionalism was simply that one must distinguish between the truth of a relationship and the historically-relative form in which that truth is expressed. His concern was that we not claim exclusive validity for the explicitly Christian way of speaking of God and the specifically Christian symbols and events used in articulating God's revelation. Hence his frequent strictures against Christomonism and against absolutizing certain other Christian formulations, documents, institutions or doctrinal interpretations.[103] The sovereignty of God is surely for Niebuhr indisputably and universally valid, but the form by which one comes to acknowledge His sovereignty is relative and limited to one's historical and religious situation.

Any criticism of relativism and confessionalism such as Cobb's presupposes that man has a universal standpoint from which to make universally valid claims. Relativism, on the other hand, insists that because man has only a relative standpoint he can make claims that are valid only within his standpoint. Man cannot transcend his relative standpoint to assert universal validity. Relativism is simply the acknowledgement of the limits of knowledge, but as such it necessarily involves other "rules" than that of our traditional understanding of truth.

This is one of the points of Gordon Kaufman, a former student of Niebuhr's, in his analysis of the problem of Relativism, Knowledge and Faith.[104] Kaufman insists that to refute relativistic theories on the grounds of ordinary logic or epistemological norms is to beg "the precise question with which relativism confronts us, namely, whether these epistemological standards themselves must be revised."[105] What is necessary is a new understanding of the nature and meaning of truth consistent with the historicist position. The statement that all truth is relative is not itself an absolute truth nor must it be to be valid; it is simply a statement of the nature of human knowledge and values insofar as we are permitted to understand these from our historical standpoint.

> A historical being simply does not have available some "absolute" truth, self-identical for all time and eternity; the most he can know is the truth for his time, the goods and values relevant and meaningful in his situation.[106]

This does not mean that there is no truth at all for historically-relative man; it simply means that the very concept of "truth" means "what is available within our particular historical situation, not some final truth for all time."[107]

In the final analysis, it is theocentric relativism rather than historical relativism that is decisive for Niebuhr.[108] To proclaim the absolute validity of any human apprehension of God is to risk the possibility of substituting that apprehension for the One to whom it points. Niebuhr saw the relativity of man's knowledge as a corrolary to the absolute sovereignty of God. Confessionalism itself is a confession of faith.

Summary

The context and limits of theological reflection are dictated by the relational character of human existence and human knowledge. Man is inescapably related to nature, society, historical experience, and God; his knowing reflects the matrix of relationships in which his being is set. As a result all human knowing is not only conditioned by the social-historical standpoint; a standpoint is itself the condition of knowledge.

One aspect of one's perspective is defined by his relationship to history. Historical relativism means that one's understanding reflects his social-historical context and that no one can occupy a position that transcends his historical time and place so as to claim to have a universally valid perception of reality. This does not imply, however, that his relative insight is untrue or "subjective." It merely suggests that what he understands is a partial and particular apprehension of an objective reality. For theology this means that the perspective of the historic Christian community is the standpoint from within which it apprehends its relative but genuine understanding of the nature and meaning of the relationship of God and man.

Because God is known only from within the relationship that acknowledges him as God, the theologian is further limited to the perspective of faith. He is not thereby forced to deal only with faith, but from the standpoint of faith he can affirm the independent sovereign reality of God. The perspective of faith is the condition of the apprehension of God. However, since it deals with the relationship of man and God in faith, theology can never fully abstract either party from that relationship so that its "complex object" is "God and man in relation." Further, the faith method recognizes that what we mean by God is that which functions as value center for man's life. The relationship of faith is a value relation, but it is not a relation which must conform to some prior human values. Rather, the God-man relationship fulfils values given with the relationship itself.

Since it must begin from within a particular historical-religious standpoint, theology cannot claim that its apprehensions transcend that perspective. It must be resolutely confessional, avoiding the temptation to extend its claims to truth beyond the confession of its own faith. Thus the task of theology is to understand the meaning and implications of faith for the Christian community in our time.

Finally, the relationship to history and to God through faith are not independent relationships but are interrelated in triadic form. That is, the self is related to God through history to which God is also related, and the self is related to history via its relationship to God. Christian faith is mediated through historical events perceived from the perspective of a particular historical community, the Christian church. Theological reflection occurs within the context of this "triad of faith" which includes the self or theologian, history or the historic community and the events which constituted it, and God.

The remainder of this dissertation consists of an elaboration on these matters, first, by looking more closely at Niebuhr's understanding of the nature of faith, then, by considering in abstract form his view of the nature of the history in which God is revealed and faith is elicited, and finally, by examining the concrete or material elements involved in this historic faith.

NOTES

[1] H. Richard Niebuhr, The Responsible Self (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), pp. 149-150. Hereafter cited RS.

[2] Niebuhr's understanding of the relational nature of existence was influenced by such social psychologists as G. H. Mead and C. H. Cooley and by Martin Buber, *inter alia*, but it was surely also Biblical in its source. Niebuhr acknowledges his debt to these thinkers throughout his works.

[3] RS, p. 48.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 56. Niebuhr uses the word responsible in the double sense of "able to respond" and "accountable."

[5] See RS, p. 160, where Niebuhr uses the three Latin phrases.

[6] H. Richard Niebuhr, The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry, with Daniel Day Williams and James M. Gustafson (New York: Harper & Bros., 1956), p. 34. Hereafter cited PCM.

[7] RS, p. 71.

[8] Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 71-73. Cf. also H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Ego-Alter Dialectic and the Conscience," The Journal of Philosophy, XLII, 13 (June 21, 1945), pp. 353-354.

[9] RS, p. 78.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 77. This constitutes the essence of Niebuhr's critique of Mead's concept of the "generalized other." Niebuhr's point is that we "do not abstract some vague general figure from all the particular individuals who together constitute my society," (RS, p. 78) but that we judge ourselves in the light of a particular concrete person who also represents a general social group and hence set of values.

[11] See *infra*, pp. 99-102.

[12] Memory for Niebuhr includes both an individual's remembrance of his own past and of the past of his communities. See *infra*, pp. 172-174 for the discussion of Niebuhr's understanding of memory.

[13] RS, pp. 94-95.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 93.

[15] *Ibid.*

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 96.

[17] *Ibid.*

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 101.

[19] *Ibid.*, pp. 101 ff.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 104.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 105.

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 112.

[23] *Ibid.*, pp. 119-120.

[24] H. Richard Niebuhr, "A Communication: The Only Way Into the Kingdom of God," *The Christian Century*, XLIX, 14 (April 6, 1932), p. 447.

[25] *Ibid.*

[26] H. Richard Niebuhr, *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1960), p. 45. Hereafter cited *RMWC*.

[27] Julian Hartt, "The Situation of the Believer," *Faith and Ethics*, ed. Paul Ramsay (New York: Harper & Bros., 1957), p. 227. (This book, a collection of essays on Niebuhr by some of his former students, will be cited hereafter as *FE*.) The question of the being of the believing self is treated at some length by Hartt though not in exposition of Niebuhr's thought. Hartt is suggesting what he sees as the necessary ontological situation of the believer in Niebuhr's theology. My discussion of the problem here is indebted to Hartt for some suggestions but for the most part, I have relied on Niebuhr's *RS*, published several years after Hartt's essay was written and bearing directly on the question at hand.

[28] *RS*, pp. 109-110.

[29] "The Ego-Alter Dialectic and the Conscience," p. 353.

[30] Hartt, p. 228.

[31] *RS*, p. 113.

[32] Hartt's definition of personhood, p. 229. However, it seems to be faithful to Niebuhr's understanding of the self.

[33] Hartt's term, p. 227.

[34] Emil Fackenheim in his little work, *Metaphysics and Historicity*, has argued that the existentialist view of the self-constituting self requires an ontology of a given "substantial" self that exists in being prior to its becoming. Although the context of his discussion is slightly different from our present context, the analysis would seem to apply.

[35] Niebuhr acknowledges his indebtedness to Martin Buber's classic distinction. See H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1941), p. 65, where this distinction is applied to the two aspects of history and acknowledgement is made to Buber.

[36] *RS*, p. 84.

[37] See *RS*, pp. 82-83.

[38] *Ibid*., p. 96.

[39] Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation*, p. 13. Hereafter cited *MR*.

[40] *Ibid*., p. 7.

[41] *Ibid*., p. 9.

[42] *Ibid*., pp. 10-11.

[43] *Ibid*., p. 11.

[44] See H. Richard Niebuhr, "Dogma," *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, ed. E. A. Seigman (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1931), Vol. V, pp. 190-191.

[45] *MR*, p. 16.

[46] *Ibid*., p. 17.

[47] *Ibid*., pp. viii-ix.

[48] H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1951), p. 239. Hereafter cited *CC*.

[49] *MR*, pp. 21-22.

[50] *RS*, pp. 44-45.

[51] See *infra*, pp. 123-130.

[52] Cf. H. Richard Niebuhr, "Reformation: Continuing Imperative," *The Christian Century*, LXXVII, 9 (March 2, 1960), p. 249. Hereafter cited *RCI*. One of Niebuhr's most persistent critics at this point has been Paul Ramsey. Cf. his "The Transformation of Ethics," *FE*, pp. 151 ff.

[53] *MR*, pp. 18-19.

[54] Cf. Ramsey, p. 156.

[55] See *infra*, pp. 167-168 where we note Niebuhr's suggestion that the church listen to those outside its perspective, i.e., that we allow our internal history to be subjected to criticism and correction by histories external to our own.

[56] *MR*, p. 20.

[57] *Ibid.*

[58] *Ibid.*

[59] Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

[60] Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 48-49.

[61] Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 49 ff.

[62] *Ibid.*, p. 45.

[63] *Ibid.*, p. 48.

[64] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

[65] H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1937). Hereafter cited *KGA*.

[66] Niebuhr's study of the history of American theology that led to *KGA* was unquestionably influential for his mature theological thinking, especially on the question of the sovereignty of God. Similarly, *Christ and Culture* offered him the opportunity to work out the implications of his conversionist posture.

[67] *PCM*, pp. 87-88.

[68] *RCI*, p. 251.

[69] *MR*, p. 23.

[70] Quoted *Ibid.*

[71] H. Richard Niebuhr, "Value-Theory and Theology," *The Nature of Religious Experience: Essays in Honor of Douglas Clyde Macintosh*, ed. J. S. Bixler *et al.* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1937), p. 112.

[72] *PCM*, pp. 112-113.

[73] *RMWC*, p. 15.

[74] *PCM*, p. 113.

[75] *Ibid.*, p. 34.

[76] *MR*, p. 28.

[77] H. Richard Niebuhr, "Religious Realism and the Twentieth Century," *Religious Realism*, ed. D. C. Macintosh (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1931), pp. 420-421.

[78] Ibid., p. 421.

[79] Ibid.

[80] RCI, p. 250.

[81] MR, p. 28.

[82] RMWC, p. 12.

[83] Niebuhr, "Value-Theory . . ," p. 112.

[84] See RMWC, pp. 24 f. et passim.

[85] Ibid., p. 122.

[86] Niebuhr, "Value-Theory . . ," p. 112. Cf. also RMWC, pp. 114-115.

[87] RMWC, p. 115.

[88] Since, in Niebuhr's relational value theory, beings interacting with other beings always exist in some value-relationship, it is not correct to assert, as Hans Frei does, that being has precedence over value in the order of being though not in the order of knowing. ("The Theology of H. Richard Niebuhr," FE, pp. 70 ff.) Rather, being and value are posited together. As Niebuhr notes in a book published after Frei's essay: "It is not at all evident that the One beyond the many, whether made known in revelation or always present to man in hiddenness, is principle of being before it is principle of value. Believing man does not say first, 'I believe in a creative principle,' and then, 'I believe that the principle is gracious, that is, good toward what issues from it.' He rather says, 'I believe in God the Father, Almighty Maker of heaven and earth.' This is a primary statement, a point of departure and not a deduction. In it the principle of being is identified with the principle of value and the principle of value with the principle of being." (RMWC, pp. 32-33.)

[89] Niebuhr, "Value-Theory . . ," p. 95.

[90] MR, pp. 30-31.

[91] Niebuhr, "Value-Theory . . ," pp. 111-112.

[92] RMWC, p. 112.

[93] Niebuhr, "Value-Theory . . ," p. 113.

[94] Cf. RMWC, pp. 24 ff., 116 ff., et passim.

[95] Frei, pp. 73-74.

[96] Ibid., p. 74.

[97] Niebuhr, "Value-Theory . . ," p. 116.

[98] MR, p. 37.

[99] Ibid., p. 41.

[100] Ibid., p. 40.

[101] Ibid., p. viii.

[102] John B. Cobb, Jr., Living Options in Protestant Theology (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), pp. 296 ff.

[103] Cf., e.g., PCM, pp. 44 ff., MR, pp. 147 ff., RCI, p. 250, for instances of Niebuhr's criticism of Christian idolatries.

[104] Gordon D. Kaufman, Relativism, Knowledge and Faith (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960).

[105] Ibid., p. 5.

[106] Gordon D. Kaufman, Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968), p. 339.

[107] Ibid., p. 340.

[108] As Frei notes, pp. 87 f.

CHAPTER IV

FAITH, REASON AND IMAGINATION

The Nature of Faith

Niebuhr's understanding of the relational character of man's being together with his view of the valuational nature of faith means that faith is "an inescapable element in all personal existence."[1] Faith in some sense is involved in all that man is, thinks and does. Man is a faith-ful animal.

> This is one of the strange things about man. Not that he is a rational animal but that he is kind of a personal covenanting being . . . Not simply that he loves, but that he lives by faith and unless he has faith doesn't live at all as man.[2]

For man to live at all he must have some reason or purpose to live, some faith that life is worth living, and therefore some object of faith on which he relies for life's meaning and worth. "To be a self is to have a god."[3] As early as 1935 Niebuhr had noted the universality of faith and the nature of faith as trust and loyalty. He objected to the understanding of sin as sensuality or as selfishness and to the identification of sin with creatureliness. Instead he maintained that sin is idolatry; it always involves trust in and loyalty to some finite object and therefore distrust and disloyalty vis-a-vis God.[4] "Not only the just but also the unjust, insofar as they live, live by faith."[5] Where faith is understood as trust in a center of value which makes life worth living, faith is necessarily a corollary of being human.

> It is a curious and inescapable fact about our lives, of which I think we all become aware at some time or another, that we cannot live without a cause, without some object of devotion, some center of worth, something on which we rely for our meaning. In this sense all men have faith because they are men and cannot help themselves . . . For no man lives without living for some purpose, for the glorification of some god, for the advancement of some cause.[6]

Niebuhr suggests two basic meanings of faith, corresponding to his view of the two essential modes of relationship. Impersonal or noetic faith refers to intellectual assent, a belief about things; it usually takes the form of indirect or mediated understanding and its antithesis is knowledge which is more direct. Thus, one may believe that Caesar crossed the Rubicon, or that cats have nine lives. In both instances one is giving assent to propositions of which he cannot have immediate knowledge but which he accepts as true "on faith." There are many different kinds of noetic faith (Niebuhr lists five[7]) with different degrees of assurance or directness and with differing kinds of mediation. At least one kind of noetic faith is mediated through the second basic type of faith, interpersonal faith, for we often trust persons to be faithful witnesses to the truth about objects.

Interpersonal faith, the sense of the word with which Niebuhr is primarily concerned, refers to the qualities of trust and loyalty in personal relationships. Its antithesis is neither knowledge nor intellectual doubt, but distrust, deception, unfaithfulness and betrayal. When the Christian affirms, "I believe in God the Father Almighty," he is not primarily indicating assent to a cognitive proposition. He is expressing confidence, and he is pledging allegiance. "In the one sense it means, 'I trust in God'; in the other, 'I will keep faith with him.'"[8]

Interpersonal faith, then, involves a double movement. It is trust in that which gives value to the self and loyalty to that which the self values. The object of faith may be another person, a community, an ideology, or the One beyond the many. For the patriot the object of faith is the nation. He trusts the national life as the enduring reality by relation to which his own life derives its meaning and worth; he has confidence that the nation will not betray his trust. Everything he encounters is valuable in terms of its relationship to the national life which is his value-center. The other element of faith, loyalty or fidelity, is seen in the patriot's active devotion and faithfulness to his country.

> Trust is, as it were, the passive aspect of the faith relation. It is expressed in praise or confessed in a creed that states the self-evident principle. Loyalty or faithfulness is the active side. It values the center and seeks to enhance its glory. It makes that center its cause for which to live and labor.[9]

Faithfulness involves a commitment to seek the good of the value-center; it means devotion to the cause of that which gives meaning to the self. Moreover, the relationship between the two parties is a reciprocal one involving the constant demonstration of trustworthiness on the part of the object of faith.

There is a complex reciprocity between noetic faith and interpersonal faith by virtue of the fact that interpersonal faith may be the basis for belief or that interpersonal faith may be elicited by the belief that a person is trustworthy. It would seem that in many instances both kinds of faith are involved simultaneously.

As we have noted, a personal relationship involves a third term, a cause, and where loyalty is involved in the understanding of faith, this third term is introduced. The relationship of faith refers to the trust of one self in another and of the faithfulness of both to a common cause. The patriot trusts the nation and is loyal to its cause; two patriots trust each other not simply because of their mutual friendship but because of their common national loyalty. The structure of interpersonal faith is triadic, consisting of the self trusting another, the other being faithful to the self, and both being faithful to a cause which they share.

Most important for our purposes, however, is Niebuhr's understanding that faith is elicited in the reciprocity of the relations of the complex triad of faith. We learn to trust another through the mediation of others whom we trust as faithful witnesses *vis-a-vis* the third party. For example, one trusts the nation because he believes in the testimony of other patriots to the nation's trustworthiness and he trusts their testimony because he and they both share a common national loyalty. The triad of faith is

> a dynamic interpersonal process in which there are not two terms simply, but three -- the self, the other, and the cause; and in which there is not one response (that of trust in the faithful, for instance) that maintains the structure, but where two responses are called for, trust and loyalty; and these two responses move in two directions -- toward the other and toward the common cause.[10]

The "greatest illustration of a triad of faith" is "you and I and our Neighbor, Jesus Christ, and God, the Father."[11] Jesus Christ exhibits complete confidence in God and utter loyalty to His cause. He stakes his life on his belief that God will not betray him. He is also loyal to men, although he withholds unconditioned confidence in man. In his faithfulness to men, he invites our loyalty to him, but he refers us beyond himself to that to which he was loyal. Trust in Jesus Christ points us beyond him to trust in the One whom he trusts and who demonstrates his trustworthiness by raising Christ from the dead.

> Unless God was loyal to the one who was loyal to Him and who trusted Him to the uttermost, we shall forever remain suspicious of the Source and Origin of all things, the One whom Jesus Christ called Father, but whom we cannot call Father unless He saves Christ from the dead. Here the structure of faith which appears in all of our relationships, it seems to me, appears in a kind of cosmic form. It is a triad of faith, with the infinite interactions of loyalty and trust and associated with them the actions of belief because we are men who know, as well as men who trust others to believe and to have loyalty.[12]

Faith, then, occurs in the reciprocity of the triadic relationship of self, neighbor (Jesus Christ) and God. Just as it is impossible to abstract one of these from the rest where we are dealing with the object of theology, so it is impossible in the event of faith. Moreover, Jesus Christ is mediated to the self by the historic Christian community, of which he is the Head, so that this member of the triad is itself a complex historical relationship.

The reciprocity of the triad of faith is such that not only do we come to faith in God by trust in the witness of neighbor, but we are also able to trust and love the neighbor by virtue of our faith in God. Trust in and love of neighbor is both the condition and the result of trust in and love of God.

> With their understanding of the divine-human nature of Jesus Christ and of the ubiquity of Christ in all compassionate and needy companions, Christians are led to see that as the neighbor cannot exist or be known or be valued without the existence, knowledge and love of God, so also God does not exist as God-for-us or become known or loved as God except in his and our relation to the neighbor. The interrelations of self, companion and God are so intricate that no member of this triad exists in his true nature without the others, nor can he be known or loved without the others.[13]

The triadic structure of faith suggests the importance of the community of other selves as the context in which faith is elicited and sustained. Niebuhr understands faith as involving the community at all points, not simply as a means of transmitting something which then becomes a "possession" apart from one's relation to others. Faith means continued faithfulness to the community of other persons as well as to God, for other persons constitute God's cause. Faith simply does not exist apart from the indissoluble triad of self, neighbor and God.

Niebuhr's understanding of faith as we have treated it thus far has several important implications for theology. First, it tends to blunt the sharpness of the dichotomy between faith and knowledge by suggesting that faith in some form is involved in nearly all that we know and do. The example of the scientific community's interpersonal trust in each other in their mutual quest for the truth which they in turn have faith will be of some benefit to mankind serves to make this point.

Secondly, by understanding faith as trust and loyalty within the relationships of selves, Niebuhr has laid the groundwork for the view that faith is elicited by historical personal acts within a community of selves. Interpersonal faith is at least partly a result of the demonstration of trustworthiness on the part of selves, a demonstration that must be to some extent outer and observable, that is, it must involve objective relations between selves at some point. Faith, like all man's being and doing, involves a reciprocity between inner and outer, between self and others, and between the thinking, valuing and doing functions of the unified self.[14]

Third, Niebuhr's phenomenological analysis of faith blunts the distinction between religious and secular forms of faith. His understanding of the universality of faith provides the basis for his conversionism, his view that radical faith is not a de novo creation but the transformation of man's natural faith. He is therefore able to see radical faith present although in distorted form in man's secular life and faith, thus enabling him to affirm a positive relationship between the realm of creation or nature and the sphere of redemption or grace. As a result of all of these implications, the question for theology is not whether one has faith but in what form one has it and how a particular form is elicited.

Radical Faith and the Forms of Faith

When he turns from the analysis of the nature of faith to the forms of faith in human experience, Niebuhr finds three general types. The most common form of faith is henotheism, "that social faith which makes a finite society, whether cultural or religious, the object of trust as well as of loyalty."[15]

Nationalism, Communism and other political henotheisms are expressions of this form as is ecclesiasticism, faith in the religious institution and its dogmas and practices as the source of the self's values. The alternative to a henotheistic social faith "with its relative unification of life is pluralism in faith and polytheism among the gods."[16] Here the self expresses its trust and loyalty toward multiple centers of value, pursued more or less equally. The dissolution of the social faith may also lead to the idolatry of selfhood, which Niebuhr sees as the faith of Epicureanism and existentialism.

The third form of faith, radical monotheism, appears in Western civilization "more as hope than as datum, more perhaps as a possibility than as an actuality."[17] Formally, radical monotheism has as its value center no relative principle or finite reality but the One beyond the many, the principle of being itself. In radical faith, the self relies on the source of all being for its own significance and for the value of all that is. Radical faith

> is the assurance that because I am, I am valued, and because you are, you are beloved, and because whatever is has being, therefore it is worthy of love. It is the confidence that whatever is, is good, because it exists as one thing among the many which all have their origin and their being, in the One -- the principle of being which is also the principle of value.[18]

Since the object of radical faith is not a finite value-center, nothing that exists is excluded from being valued.

> Monotheism is less than radical if it makes a distinction between the principle of being and the principle of value; so that while all being is acknowledged as absolutely dependent for existence on the One, only some beings are valued as having worth for it; or if, speaking in religious language, the Creator and the God of grace are not identified.[19]

For radical faith the object of loyalty, then, is the whole realm of being. It expresses itself as loyalty to each particular existent, not because of that being's value to any finite cause, but because of its participation in being. In henotheism and polytheism loyalty is due only to the members of the closed society or interest group to which faith is given; all others are regarded as enemies to be hated. In radical monotheism, however, love and loyalty are directed to all, even to those who are enemy in some less than universal context.

The ethical counterpart of radical faith is universal responsibility, which embraces the understanding that the One beyond the many is present in all the many particular acts and events that confront the self. To be universally responsible is to respond to all persons and events in confidence and loyalty to God. It is the understanding that all action directed to finite creatures is also directed to their creator.

From the standpoint of radical monotheism, all henotheisms and polytheisms are seen to be corrupted forms of radical faith in which the individual self is fragmented and the universal community is divided between competing loyalties. Even humanism, which may be a legitimate reaction against a henotheistic version of traditional religion, separates man from nature, excluding the latter from the realm of the holy and the good. Apart from radical monotheism humanism has tended to be rootless and to become itself a form of closed society faith.

> Radical monotheism dethrones all absolutes short of the principle of being itself. At the same time it reverences every relative existent. Its two great mottoes are: "I am the Lord thy God; thou shalt have no other gods before me," and "Whatever is, is good."[20]

The Conversionist Motif

The question of the relationship between man's "natural" faiths and radical faith leads us to Niebuhr's conversionism, a point to which we shall give fuller consideration in Chapter VI. Radical faith does not so much abrogate natural faith as it converts or transforms it. It retains and redirects that in henotheistic faiths which is good.

The "web of confidence"[21] in which our political life is woven together, consisting of mutual confidence between persons and communities and between the nation and its constituent parts, is a sign of the presence of health in this henotheistic faith. In the henotheism of religious institutions, similar signs appear along with personal piety and prayer and reverence for the Deity. The "positive, health-maintaining networks of faith"[22] that exist in personal and group relations is what keeps men from destroying each other and is also what radical faith builds upon. These faith-relationships may also be distorted and lacking in inclusiveness; they may be mingled with distrust, suspicion, hatred and treason. But Niebuhr sees natural faith as evidence of some degree of health in man. The Fall has not obliterated the image of God or the goodness of created life. Radical faith transforms man's natural faith by enlarging and redirecting it.

Faith and History

It should now be evident that Niebuhr's conception of faith as trust/loyalty elicited by the faithful witness of others (especially Jesus Christ) within the triad of interpersonal relationships is of immense importance to a theology that takes history seriously. We have noted the difficulties encountered by the nineteenth century understanding of faith as the non-cognitive immediate experience of the self's consciousness of being absolutely dependent on an Other. What Niebuhr has done is to change this conception of faith from an almost ineffable inner experience to a conception of faith as the fundamental attitude and quality of interpersonal relationships. In correcting the nineteenth century tradition he has been able to avoid committing the intellectualist fallacy of identifying faith with *assensus*, an error which Niebuhr finds in Karl Barth, but has remained within a modified form of the theology of Christian experience. Faith for Niebuhr involves an active, committing role of a self that expresses its faith or unfaith in all personal relationships and acts. The result is that faith can and must be understood as demonstrated and evoked by personal acts of trust in an Other and of loyalty to that Other's cause. To be sure, faith still involves immediacy in the sense that the self is directly related to a living God. However, it is also elicited by the historical life of Jesus Christ as mediated by the historic Christian community. Faith has the character of a "mediated immediacy."[23] Niebuhr's is a conception of faith that preserves the historicity of human existence and of the Christian experience.

Moreover, Niebuhr's conception of revelation as converting rather than destroying man's natural faith enables him to affirm the presence of goodness and of grace in human existence apart from Jesus Christ without minimizing Christ's significance. It enables him to affirm some degree of continuity or "point of contact" between sinful man and God, yet without reducing the gravity of sin.

Faith, Reason and Imagination

Man is not only a faithful being; he is also a thinking being. Faith and reason are not mutually exclusive but on the contrary are interrelated. Just as reason forms and interprets sense experience so it "permeates the activity of faith; it organizes, compares, reflects, criticizes and develops hypotheses in the midst of believing."[24] Reason does not lead to faith, although faithful thinking may serve to corroborate the faith relationship. Rather, "faith reasons;"[25] that is, man's thinking takes place within a context of faith, whether it be the "animal faith" in the reliability of sense experience or faith in the God of Jesus Christ. The former is the reasoning of the impersonal or pure reason whereas the latter is one form of the reasoning of the personal or practical reason, but both belong to the one thinking capacity of man.

Rational activity also involves imagination. Reason and imagination are not separate spheres any more than faith and reason are. Thinking relies on images and symbols to organize and interpret its objects. Man is more a symbolic than a rational animal as Niebuhr, acknowledging his debt to Cassirer, sees it.[26] Depth psychology also has shown that we express our deepest fears and conflicts in the forms of images and stories. In short,

> we are far more image-making and image-using creatures than we usually think ourselves to be and, further, . . . our processes of perception and conception, of organizing and understanding the signs that come to us in our dialogue with the circumambient world, are guided and formed by images in our minds.[27]

Language, of course, is a symbolic system, as are art, drama, poetry, religion, and even philosophy and science. Metaphysics, for instance, has in its long history been dependent, usually unconsciously, on the root-metaphors of generating substance, the organism, the machine, and the mathematical system.[28] Niebuhr notes that man's self-understanding as well as his interpretation of nature has been deeply affected by the often unacknowledged role which the image of the machine has played in his thinking in the last several centuries. Science of course employs the image of an ordered universe in interpreting its data and organizing them into meaningful patterns.

The question then is not whether to reason with or without images but what images are most adequate for our reasoning. The mind is not a passive recipient of experience but a symbolic-rational agent which shapes reality with the aid of images and metaphors which are often unconscious and taken for granted. Our conceptual systems are largely abstractions from our symbolic forms, which are a function of the perspective we occupy. That is, our images reflect and shape our basic standpoint in whatever area of experience we may be concerned with. Niebuhr's perspective of relational existence is informed and guided by the image of man-in-dialogue, the symbol of responsibility.

Thus, Niebuhr's concept of symbolic form includes a double reference. On the one hand, it refers to the representation of what we experience, and on the other, a symbolic form structures or forms our changing understanding of reality.[29] A symbolic form, then, might be defined as an "interpretive image."[30] The symbolic forms or fundamental images by which we understand experience are not chosen arbitrarily but are the result of the interaction of selves and historical experience. They are historically relative, and so the image of responsibility emerges in a time when men are becoming more aware that their lives are constituted by their relationships to other selves in history and in society. So too the basic image through which Christians understand reality, Jesus Christ, originates in history.

Whether in the impersonal thinking of the pure reason or in the personal apprehensions of the practical reason, the task of reason is to find and employ the most adequate and appropriate images. Erroneous thinking in the natural sciences is often the result of the application of the wrong image to the data of sense experience. Similarly, the understanding of selves is hampered by the use of inappropriate images. One such "evil imagination of the heart" is the image of the self as the center of existence. The individual or collective egoist interprets all that happens in terms of its effect on its own existence. So the self judges an international conflict in terms of the economic benefit that may accrue to it, or the nation views a war as a holy crusade in behalf of its ideals. The egocentric image fails to make sense out of human existence because it leaves large areas of life unintelligible and impoverishes, isolates and alienates the self from other selves.

Another common error in our thinking is the confusion of symbolic categories. We may employ "in the understanding of personal relations the images which we have learned to use with some success in our external, non-participating knowledge of things."[31] The result is that selves are reduced to things, Thous to its. So we interpret personal and social ills as the effects of economic and biological factors rather than as egocentricity and irresponsibility. Niebuhr does not mean to deny the validity and importance of impersonal reasoning in our understanding of nature and to some extent in our apprehension of the human world.[32] He merely insists that it does not provide adequate images for our thinking about personal life.

> The participant in life simply cannot escape thinking in terms of persons and of values. It would be possible to do so only if he could depersonalize the self, become a body without an inner life, without joys and sorrows, loves and hates, without neighbors, without hope or fear -- a thing in a world of things. But in such a world no truth would ever need to be uttered; existence without worth or unworthiness would be all in all. The images of the observational method are . . . out of place in the life of participation.[33]

The "data" of personal existence are the "affections of the self."[34] Reason's task in this sphere is to employ images that enable us to interpret and understand our joys and sorrows, hopes and fears, loves and hates, our relationships with other persons, the meaning and destiny of our lives in communities and in our history. The image "neither evil nor inadequate which enables the heart to understand"[35] is given to Christians in the revelatory event. We can therefore speak of revelation as the giving of a symbolic perspective through which the whole of our individual and communal life becomes intelligible.[36]

The Responsible Self

The symbolic perspective given in revelation is continually in need of being supplemented by other images which enable us to understand better the meaning of the revelatory symbol for present experience. One such image emerging in contemporary consciousness is, as we have noted, the symbol of responsibility. The symbol of responsibility and the symbol of Jesus Christ exist in a dialectical relationship for Niebuhr. The image of responsibility helps us to understand Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ helps us to understand the meaning of responsibility. Each image refracted through the lens of the other aids us in understanding ourselves and offers us "a new form in which to understand ourselves in our relation to Christ."[37]

The conceptual scheme that is abstracted from the image of homo dialogicus both describes our experience and guides us in interpreting our situation. We have noted the descriptive aspect in our discussion of Niebuhr's ontology. As an interpretive guide responsibility theory has four elements.[38] The first is the basic understanding that all action is interaction or response and that one's responses should be appropriate or fitting to the context. The second factor is the recognition that all action upon us is interpreted action. This includes not only my individual interpretation of the action but also the culturally given meaning. Of course, our response to an action is a function of the interpretation we give it which in turn depends on its various contextual levels. The third element, accountability, points to the future-directed nature of human activity. It refers to the account that must be taken of anticipated responses to my responsive action, and to the fact that the responsible self stands by his act and bears its consequences. To be accountable is to continue to act and react fittingly in a complex continuum of actions and reactions. It also raises the question of who or what it is to which I am accountable, both penultimately and ultimately and just how I might reconcile any possible conflict between these. The final element is what Niebuhr calls social solidarity, the awareness of the ongoing social context in which action occurs. These elements, though distinguishable, are not separable. Together they form the structure of responsible, not simply responsive, action. They aid in sensitizing the self to the complex context of responsible action, but they represent a formal analysis and are in need of supplementation by a material perspective. The image of responsibility and the image given in revelation come together as the formal and the material principles which aid in our comprehension of reality.

Conclusion: The Unity of the Self

It is evident that Niebuhr conceives of the self as an organic whole in all its manifold functions and relationships. The knowing self depends in its knowing capacity on values and images that are not derived solely from empirical experience or rational activity. The faithful self relies on the aid of reason and empirical knowledge in coming to and verifying its commitments. Faith and reason, thinking and doing, knowing and believing, subject and object, self and others, even personal and impersonal relationships -- all these are related reciprocally in that complex unity-in-diversity we call the self. The self that responds to the actions of others upon it is a single self.

However, the reciprocity that exists between the self's capacities is merely a description of a functional unity of the self that points to the possibility of integration at the level of commitment or personhood. For the self that is unified in its functions may be torn apart by the variety of its commitments and the apparent conflicts between the demands made upon it; it is divided by the plurality of its gods. The self is genuinely integrated only when it is grasped by a cause or center of value that is sufficient to unify all its thinking and doing. For Christians the integration of the self is made possible by an historic revelation.

NOTES

[1] H. Richard Niebuhr, "On the Nature of Faith," Religious Experience and Truth, ed. Sidney Hook (New York: New York University Press, 1961), p. 100.

[2] H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Triad of Faith," Andover Newton Bulletin, XLVII (1954), p. 11. Hereafter cited "Triad."

[3] MR, p. 80.

[4] See H. Richard Niebuhr, "Man the Sinner," Journal of Religion, XV (1935), esp. pp. 276-277,

[5] RMWC, p. 117.

[6] Ibid., p. 118.

[7] "On the Nature of Faith," pp. 94-98.

[8] RMWC, p. 18.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Niebuhr, "On the Nature of Faith," p. 100.

[11] "Triad," p. 9.

[12] Ibid., pp. 10-11.

[13] PCM, pp. 33-34.

[14] Niebuhr suggests at one point that it might be instructive to analyze faith in terms of the polar relations between interpersonal trust/loyalty and "theoretic orientation." He thought that it might be the case that two essential types could be distinguished in this framework: one would move "from the giveness of personal existence in trust-loyalty relations to inferences about the larger world or about what must be the case; and another . . . beginning with a theory (however gained -- through authority, or 'vision'), moves toward inferences about the personal life and its conduct." ("On the Nature of Faith," p. 101.) This further illumines Niebuhr's understanding of the reciprocity of the functions of the self.

[15] RMWC, p. 11.

[16] Ibid., p. 28.

[17] Ibid., p. 31.

[18] Ibid., p. 32.

[19] *Ibid.*

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 37.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 68.

[22] *Ibid.*

[23] The term is John Baillie's, *Our Knowledge of God* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), p. 181 *et passim*.

[24] *RMWC*, p. 13.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 14.

[26] *RS*, pp. 151f. *et passim*.

[27] *Ibid.*, pp. 151-152.

[28] Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

[29] Niebuhr uses the terms symbol, image, metaphor and model in a roughly synonymous way.

[30] This is the definition of Jerry A. Irish, "Revelation in the Thought of H. Richard Niebuhr," (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Yale University, 1967), p. 69.

[31] *MR*, pp. 102-103.

[32] He had used such images effectively in analyzing "the social sources of denominationalism" early in his career. See H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1929).

[33] *MR*, p. 106.

[34] *Ibid.*, pp. 97-98.

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 109.

[36] See *infra*, pp. 182-189 for discussion of revelation as symbolic perspective.

[37] *RS*, p. 159.

[38] See *Ibid.*, pp. 56-65 *et passim* for Niebuhr's discussion of these points.

CHAPTER V

HISTORY AND REVELATION: THE FORMAL ELEMENT

Between the modern conception of history as the sphere of human activity and the Christian claim to an historical revelation of God lies a considerable gulf. One of the problems faced by the modern theologian, then, is the problem of how revelation can "mean both history and God."[1] H. Richard Niebuhr saw the understanding of the relationship between revelation and history as a crucial problem whose resolution involved a clarification and reinterpretation of the meaning of revelation and Christology as well as of the nature of history.[2]

The Two-Aspect Theory of History

We have seen that Niebuhr holds that all knowledge is relative to the perspective of the knower. Knowledge is not only conditioned by the standpoint of the knower, but a standpoint is also the condition of knowing. That is, there is no presuppositionless, neutral or universal position available to man from which he can know "things in themselves" or events "as they really happened." What is known is a corollary of the standpoint the knower occupies.

With respect to historical knowledge Niebuhr defines two fundamental points of view that largely determine the nature of what is perceived. These two modes of knowing correspond to the two structures of relations that we have already noted.[3] The "two aspects" of history may be termed "internal and external history" or "history as lived and history as seen,"[4] and they may be described in several ways. In the terms of critical idealism external history refers to the standpoint of the pure reason which views events impersonally while internal history perceives events from the personal perspective, the standpoint of selves, and may be roughly identified with the practical reason. External history is the mode of knowing of a non-participating observer, a detached and disinterested spectator looking at an event "from the outside."[5] The relationship of the knower to the object is that of an "I" to an "it."[6]

The perspective of internal history, on the other hand, is that of the involved participant, the self concerned with the meaning and value of events for personal existence. The mode of knowing is subject-ive rather than objective, and the relationship of knower and known is that of an "I" and a "Thou." The data of internal history are feeling, hoping, fearing, loving, hating, valuing, and committing selves, and the meaning their acts might have for other selves. The data of external history, on the other hand, are

> ideas, interests, movements among things. Even when such history deals with human individuals it seeks to reduce them to impersonal parts. Jesus becomes, from this point of view, a complex of ideas about ethics and eschatology, of psychological and biological elements.[7]

In the framework of critical realism, external history may be understood as the descriptive account of events which attempts to attain as much objectivity as possible by weighing the biases of both the historian and the historical evidence and making appropriate allowances. The aim of external history is "to set forth the primary characteristics of each event . . . available to the experience of all percipients."[8] Internal history is normative in character; its concern is with values, not in the sense of private, "subjective" and arbitrary values, but those that are "common and verifiable in a community of selves."[9]

Niebuhr illustrates the difference between the content of internally apprehended events and that of external history by the example of the account of a sight-restoring operation given by the surgeon and that given by the patient. The former might describe the event in the impersonal terms of a scientific case history, while the latter would probably tell it in the personal terms of "a self that had lived in darkness and now saw again trees and the sunrise, children's faces and the eyes of a friend."[10] Niebuhr also uses the example of the American Revolution as described by Lincoln in the Gettysburg Address and by the editors of the Cambridge Modern History.[11] In both of these illustrations the same event is seen and understood in two different ways because of the different points of view of the narrators. The distinction involved is not primarily that of fact and interpretation inasmuch as both accounts are interpretations albeit from different standpoints. Neither is the distinction one of truth and error, for both views may be valid, given their differing standpoints and interests.

> It seems evident that the terms the external historian employs are not more truly descriptive of the things-in-themselves than those the statesman uses and that the former's understanding of what really happened is not more accurate than the latter's. In the one case the events of history are seen from the outside, in the other from the inside.[12]

The difference between the two aspects of history may be clarified further by noting the conceptions of value, time, and human association which each involves. For external history, value refers to "valency or strength. The objective historian must measure the importance of an event or factor by the effect it has on other events or factors in the series."[13] The historian must suppress his personal value-judgments as much as possible and express the significance of an event in its relation to other events. The valuable for internal history is what is important for the life and destiny of the self in its wholeness. "Value here means quality, not power."[14] Internal history may consider highly important what external history may find relatively insignificant: the death of Socrates would be of more concern than the conquests of Alexander: Luther's Anfechtung would be of greater value than a knowledge of the social and economic factors that led to the Reformation.

Time for external history is understood in terms of quantity or number and is serial. The past is the no-longer-present, that which is no more. The future is the not-yet, that which will be but presently is non-existent. The time of internal history is qualitative; it is duration rather than sequence. The past is what abides in the present, and the future is present as potentiality. "Time here is organic or it is social, so that past and future associate with each other in the present."[15] It is not so much that we are in time but that time is in us in the form of the remembered past and the anticipated future. Time is kairos rather than chronos.

> It is not associated with space in a unity of space-time but it is inseparable from life in the continuity of life-time. . . . Such time is not a number but a living, a stream of consciousness, a flow of feeling, thought and will.[16]

In other words, there are two senses of "the past." The past can refer to the no-longer-present, that which once was but is no more; this past, the past of external history, is a dead past. In this sense our only relationship to it is the cognitive one of knowledge of or belief about what once happened. Here the past is something objective to (other than) our present life. Such a relationship with the past is possible and necessary but it is not the only relationship. There is also a sense in which the past effectively lives on in the present in the form of customs, ideas, mental patterns, images, behavioral habits, and values.[17] It is this understanding of the internalized presence of the past that Niebuhr insists is an essential aspect of our relationship to history. The external view of history simply does not do justice to the fullness of the nature of man's relationship with history. Inasmuch as we are necessarily related to the past in the internal sense, the real question then becomes which aspects of the past we make our own, by virtue of birth and by choice, for both are involved in our somewhat fated existence.[18]

Human association in external history consists of relations of atomic individuals, who are essentially depersonalized complexes of ideas, drives and instincts. Society is understood as an intricate organization of customs, laws, institutions, and beliefs. For internal history, however, society is a community of selves. Life is not simply among others; it is with them. "They live in us and we in them. Relations here are not external but internal so that we are our relations and cannot be selves save as we are members of each other."[19] A genuine human community shares a common past and a common hope for the future. Internal history is a common or shared history; it is the history of a community of which the individual is a part and which he accepts as his own history. "When we become members of such a community of selves we adopt its past as our own and thereby are changed in our present existence."[20]

It is evident that Niebuhr's distinction between internal and external history points to two fundamentally different structures of knowing in which both subject and object as well as the mode of relationship differ. The essential distinction between the two aspects lies in the fact that in one mode knowledge of events and their meanings remain external to one's personal existence; they do not affect his life. In internal history, however, historical events and their meanings are understood as so permeating one's existence that it is impossible to abstract oneself from them. It is important to note that the distinction is not between cognitive and noncognitive aspects for cognition is involved in both modes, although the nature of knowledge may be different. Internal history has a noetic element just as surely as it has elements of faith and of imagination, but the noetic represents only one element whereas external history is only noetic. As a result, "the 'I' in the 'I-it' relation differs from the self in the 'I-Thou' setting."[21]

It is the whole self existentially involved with other "Thous." In the I-it relation the self is identified with its mental processes. Similarly, an event apprehended from within is "almost another reality"[22] than the same event perceived externally. Both structures seem to Niebuhr to be inherent in man's life, and neither is reducible to the other although they are not totally unrelated, as we shall see.

Internal history and faith, as is probably evident by now, belong together in a dialectical relationship. All men live by faith, understood as the valuational perspective of a self seeking personal meaning and a cause for which to live. That that meaning and cause are given in and through our historical existence apprehended from the standpoint of faith suggests the unavoidably circular nature of internal historical apprehension. But the experience is not without parallels in human existence. Niebuhr uses the example of man's animal faith in the existence of an external world to suggest the reciprocity involved between fundamental assumptions and experience in the ongoing process of relational life. The primitive faith with which man begins is continually tested in and shaped by experience.

> What the factors are on which we can count, what the permanent possibilities of sensation are on which we can depend in thought and act, that we cannot know save through repeated and common experience.[23]

Beginning in a vague and more or less abstract faith, men learn to distinguish between reliable and unreliable elements of their experience. So also "the faith of selves . . . is inseparable from the inner experience of selves, from what happens to them in their history."[24] We learn "what gods are dependable . . .

and which are idols"[25] only through testing our fundamental faith and having it formed by internal historical experience. Life is always "from faith to faith" but the second "faith" may well be a transformed version of the first.

The Dimensions of Internal History

The word "history" is notoriously ambiguous, having at least three interrelated meanings. It can refer to actual events, to the records of those events (historical evidence), or to the interpretation of those records (historical reconstruction or written history). Internal history refers to all three of these senses; Niebuhr does not distinguish between them because he views them as mutually implicated. However, it is important for our analysis to clarify these dimensions of internal history.

On the one hand, internal history refers to the mode of apprehension of actual events by those who recorded the memory-impressions of the events, whether their own recollections or that of others. As far as the New Testament is concerned, of course, this record is highly selective and involves the personal viewpoint that we have described. However, it is not necessarily unreliable as an interpretation of actual events, and it is of course the only record of and hence the only perspective we have on the life of Jesus. Niebuhr's perspectivism maintains that events perceived internally are based on actual history.

> When the evangelists of the New Testament and their successors pointed to history as the starting point of their faith and of their understanding of the world it was internal history that they indicated. They did not speak of events as impersonally apprehended, but rather of what had happened to them in their community.[26]

Secondly, internal history refers to the present interpretation of events and the internalization of their meaning for selves. In this sense it signifies both a hermeneutical standpoint from which we interpret historical evidence and the content gained from that procedure appropriated as images which form our self-understanding. Of course it is just as true to say that the hermeneutical standpoint proceeds from the internalized meaning, since what is involved is a constant dialectical interaction. The present interpreter occupies the same standpoint as the original interpreters, for both belong to the one community of faith. The present interpreter relies on the original interpreter not for factual accuracy but for a faithful representation of the personal meaning of the event.

> One must look with them and not at them to verify their visions, participate in their history rather than regard it if one would apprehend what they apprehended.[27]

Through this internal dialogue with the past that takes place in an ongoing community, internal history links past and present by the appropriation in the present of the meaning of a past event as apprehended by its contemporaries.

Before proceeding to the next section, it would be well to summarize Niebuhr's theory as we can state it at this point. First, Niebuhr is simply calling attention to a fundamental epistemological principle that applies to historical knowing as well as to all our apprehension. That principle is simply that what is perceived is a function of the perspective or mode of perception. Secondly, Niebuhr is suggesting that there are two fundamental ways of perceiving events, personal and impersonal or internal and external. This is not a precise categorization but it does point to a rather basic distinction between two general kinds of intentionality, one of which would seem to be involved in a dominant way in all knowing. Third, since the intentionality of the knower determines the kind and content of apprehension, one must avoid using one mode of knowing to establish knowledge of the other kind; that is to be guilty of mixing categories. One's standpoint determines the nature of one's knowledge. This is not to preclude the possibility of relations between the two modes of knowing; it is simply to suggest the limitations that must be observed. Fourth, given the nature of human life with its inner and outer aspects, "there is no speculative escape"[28] from this duality. Man lives in two worlds; this is "the paradox of Chalcedonian Christology and of the two-world ethics of Christianity."[29] However, the two aspects are related in "practical" ways, as we shall see. Finally, internal history refers to the perspective of both the original interpreters, and hence of the sources, and the standpoint of the present percipient. One can only apprehend personal meaning if the intentionality of the present interpreter corresponds to that of the source.

The Unity of History: The Relations of Internal and External History

Niebuhr acknowledges that the two aspects theory of history simply points up the "duality in union which is the nature of Christian life and history."[30] In his discussion of the relations between the two aspects, Niebuhr attempts to provide for some unity and continuity in the midst of this duality and discontinuity. These three functional or "practical" relationships may be termed incorporation, universality, and embodiment.

First, the interpretations of the external perspective may be incorporated into one's internal history, where they may serve a self-critical function or may act as a catalyst for re-interpretation. For example, the church has profited from external histories of itself such as those of heretics and of modern critics of Christianity. As a result, the church has been reminded of its own failures, distortions, and idolatries.

Although Niebuhr does not say so specifically, it would seem consistent with this principle to suggest that external history in the sense of scientific historical reconstruction can be adopted to some extent by Christian internal history. Scientific history can enable the church to be more precise about what it does and does not mean by the person and event of Jesus Christ. Christians need not adopt uncritically all that even the most responsible scientific historians say about Jesus, but they can clarify and re-interpret their claims in the light of new insight and information. This of course is precisely what has happened and continues to happen.

Secondly, through the revelation of God disclosed in Christian internal history, faith acknowledges the activity of God in all historical events, even those it regards from the external point of view. Although the Christian apprehends God in a particular history, he recognizes the presence of God in other histories to which he is related externally and in universal history. "Thus prophets, for whom the revelation of God was connected with his mighty acts in the deliverance of Israel from bondage, found the marks of that God's working in the histories of all the nations."[31] As a result of his awareness of God in his own history, the Christian can recognize the rule of God in events other than those which are revelatory to him.

Finally, "the internal life does not exist without external embodiment."[32] Insofar as external history points to the fact of the occurrence of an event which inner history regards as personally meaningful, it may be said to represent the "medium in which internal history exists and comes to life."[33] Here Niebuhr seems to be suggesting that internal and external history are unified by virtue of the fact that they are both based on one course of events and share the same documentary evidence such as the Bible and other historical sources, although they read them from differing points of view. However, Niebuhr seems also to be using the term external simply as synonymous with what Dilthey called objective _Geist_, the external expressions on which historians depend for their reconstructions. In this sense historical documents are the outer expression of inner experiences and as such are the basis for the inner experiences of others.

> Such is the alternation of our life that the thought which becomes a word can become thought again only through the mediation of the word; the word which becomes flesh can become word for us again only through the flesh.[34]

The unity of history is based on the fact that there is one course of events although they may be seen from two different perspectives. There are not two histories but two distinguishable aspects of one history. The two aspects are not primarily different interpretations of "what happened" but different assessments of the meaning of events. Moreover, the formal structures of internal and external history are the same. Both structures consist of a triadic relationship between an apprehending self, a community of faith, and an event. However, the primary difference is in the nature of the community of faith to which both self and event are related, and that in turn means that self and event are different also. Niebuhr seems to have several kinds of faith communities in mind when he speaks of external history (as we shall soon note) but one of these is the scientific community with its faith in the value of objective research. By internal history Niebuhr has in mind the Christian community of faith (although the Marxist community, for example, would also qualify as having an internal history).

Confessionalism or the acknowledgement of the limits of relative knowledge would suggest that neither perspective can claim that its assessment is the only valid one, while insisting on the truth of its claims within the epistemological limits of its perspective. At least this principle can be maintained where external history means scientific history. For internal history does not insist that it has some special knowledge of "what happened" that is not accessible to the scientific historian. At the same time the impersonal historian need not claim to have the only valid view; each perspective can recognize the differing nature of its apprehensions. Christian internal history can allow the validity of scientific history within its limits and acknowledge its aid without repudiating its own apprehensions. This discussion carries us into the problem of the relation of "fact" and "meaning" in theology's interaction with history, but we must reserve further discussion of that complex problem until we have treated Niebuhr's understanding of revelation.

Internal History as the Presence of the Past

The two aspect theory of history provides the basic framework for understanding how revelation can refer to both God and history by suggesting that the history to which revelation refers is not that apprehended by an impersonal observer but history as apprehended by a personal participant. However, if revelation is based on or in some sense grounded in an event of the past, the question arises as to how revelation can also be a present event. One answer to this problem has been to equate revelation with certain propositions about God and man disclosed to men in the past and through events of the past. Niebuhr finds this view unacceptable for a number of reasons. In the first place, it is to equate faith with intellectual assent, with all the problems that entails. In the second place, the God of such a view is a God of the past, not a living God revealing himself to men today.

Another solution to the problem of the presence of the past has been to identify revelation with "the cumulative historical influence of past events."[35] The difficulty here is that God is too uncritically equated with the historical process, raising serious problems about his radical sovereignty and freedom.

Niebuhr sought to answer the problem by bringing to bear three closely related conceptions. The first, the understanding of time as duration, involved, as we have seen, the insistence that the past endures in the present in the form of values, ideas, ways of understanding, etc., that have been preserved in our common life. This conception is integral to any understanding of the historicity of human existence.

A second element in Niebuhr's treatment of the problem of the presence of the past is his understanding of the symbolic nature of much that endures in man's common historical life. We have already noted the importance of image and symbol in Niebuhr's view of our thinking processes, and we shall shortly be discussing the symbolic aspect of revelation. Here we must simply note that the past can be understood as present in the form of images and symbols cast up by events which serve an interpretative function in the present. Many of the symbols and images we use in interpreting and organizing present experience have come to us out of our past, but their importance is not to be found in the accuracy with which they record the event by which they were evoked. Their significance lies in their ability to make sense of present experience. They are not important as objective or factual knowledge of the past, but as the presence of the past in symbolic form they enable us to see patterns of meaning in the present.

The third concept that Niebuhr uses to understand how the past is alive in the present is the notion of memory. Niebuhr did not develop the concept of memory quite as fully as we shall here, but these reflections seem to represent what is implicit in his thought.[36] By memory Niebuhr means what one remembers as his own by virtue of his membership in an historical community. What one remembers in this context is that which belongs to the tradition of that community which one has internalized and made his own. This can be said to be part of my memory because I am who I am only by virtue of my participation in that community. My history is intimately involved with the history of particular communities. Thus Niebuhr's notion of memory involves a reciprocity between individual and community, a reciprocity that is simply a fact of human life.

It is evident that Niebuhr uses the term "memory" in a somewhat different and extended sense than its use in ordinary language. Ordinarily memory refers to one's recollection of an experience in which he was involved directly, and Niebuhr intends this reference in his usage. He is suggesting that we are directly involved in events that transpired before our birth because such events have shaped our lives significantly. One properly "remembers" only one's own experience and those events which have become so much a part of one's life that self-understanding would be impossible apart from reference to them.

> The common memory of the community consists in a subjective understanding of its past; each of its members in the present relives the meanings of past events in its history, and makes them part of his personal history.

> Common memory involves an empathetic participation in the history of the community through the stories and other expressions of past events. Members of the Church in the present time grasp, understand, and identify themselves with the meanings of events recorded and interpreted in the Bible, Christian symbols, and other representations.[37]

However, memory usually refers to that which we retain in our minds apart from any external evidence, and in this sense memory is notoriously unreliable as a basis for historical reconstruction. Niebuhr's use of memory does not refer to undocumented private recollections, for the common memory is possible because, as Dilthey understood it, the subjective experiences of a people are expressed objectively in their arts, philosophy, value systems, literary works, religious and political customs and institutions, etc. The presence of these historical monuments is what enables the inner life of the past to be understood through sympathetic interpretation. Formally speaking, the process moves from inner to outer and back to inner again, that is, from subjective life to objective expression which then is the basis for a re-experiencing of the subjective by later generations.

For the Church, the objective expressions include the Bible, creeds, Christian symbols, art, and the traditions of worship including the Holy Communion. Each of these may serve as the basis for an imaginative reconstruction and re-enactment of the meaning-events Christians consider decisive. Of course, the Bible is the fundamental record of those events. Through the reading and interpretation of the Bible and the continual rehearsal of the important events of its history, the Christian community keeps its common memory alive and relives the past. By participating in the meaningful history of the community, the self "comes to interpret and understand itself in the light of these meanings. The meaning of the past is internalized."[38] And because these meaning-events are preserved and internalized by a community of persons who share the same history and the same memory, the memory of inner history is not a private, subjective understanding.

The experience of a common memory is not unique to Christians and Jews; it is found in some form in every human community.[39] The American nation has its own common memory, objectified in historical documents, customs and traditions. This common past is relived on national holidays and public occasions. It is present insofar as it is relived or re-experienced by re-telling "the story of our lives." So it is with the history that unites Christians.

Finally, it should be noted that what we remember in internal history is not an objective account of historical events nor is it doctrines in the form of propositions about the nature of God and man. What we remember is primarily a story which suggests meaningful images which become the basis for understanding and organizing present experience. Niebuhr's understanding of the presence of the past in this threefold way makes possible an understanding of revelation that is both historically rooted and is the self-revelation of a living God in the present.

We can now summarize the nature of internal history by noting the several dimensions implicit in Niebuhr's concept.[40] In doing this it should be evident that Niebuhr has combined several of the conceptions of history developed by nineteenth and early twentieth century theology and effected a new Gestalt in his understanding of internal history. In the first place, internal history includes the level of historical actuality. It refers to something that really happened in ordinary human existence as opposed to "the fictitious, the fabulous, the mythical, [and] the legendary."[41] Secondly, however, what happened is apprehended from a particular point of view, the perspective of involved, valuing, faith-ful persons as opposed to a disinterested, impersonal standpoint. Inner history is therefore an interpretation of a particular community with a particular faith and that interpretation includes the effects believed to have been wrought by the event in question. In other words, the event is treated as an historical whole rather than as an isolated event. In this sense an event in internal history includes not only its having happened, but its significance to and its influence on the community of persons who apprehend it. Third, internal history, as we have just noted, is the history of a community. It represents that meaning-event complex which a particular community of persons has internalized and appropriated in such a way as to be decisive for its own history and identity. It is that meaning-event that has constituted them as a community and without which they cannot understand themselves. Because it is shared by a community, internal history is not a private, "subjective" apprehension. Fourth, internal history, by virtue of its being limited to a particular community's point of view, cannot claim to refer to timeless or eternal truth. Herberg aptly coins the term "historiform" to refer to historical truth as opposed to "the kind of timeless eternity possessed, or supposed to be possessed, by abstract concepts, eternal verities, and the like."[42] In this sense inner history is, as Niebuhr puts it, "the story of our lives," where the emphasis is on both "story" and "our." A fifth dimension of internal history refers to the historicity of the individual. Internal history is that meaning-event which is internalized by a person in such a way that it becomes his own history apart from which he cannot understand or identify himself. He is constituted by his history. At the same time, a person's inner self-constituting history is the basis for his responsible action in the face of future possibility. Inner history involves a meaning-event of the past appropriated in the present that is decisive for present and future responsibility. Finally, internal history is a dynamic rather than a static and fixed thing. Its meaning is continually tested and realized as it is brought to bear on each new situation in the divine-human drama.

Revelation and History

Revelation and Internal History

Revelation cannot be equated with inner history, but it occurs within the context of inner history. This implies several things about the formal nature of revelation. First, revelation is grounded in historical actuality. It occurs within the context of the history of Israel and particularly in the person of Jesus of Nazareth in which radical faith became incarnate, respectively, in the life of a nation and of a person. Revelation does not refer to peculiarly religious or mystical or supernatural experiences; its locus is ordinary events.

> The [revelatory] events were not mystic visions or ecstatic experiences in which men were transported out of their daily world; they were not answers to human cries for help directed to supernatural powers; they were not peculiarly encounters with the holy. The revelatory moments occurred in the midst of political struggles, of national and cultural crises. As they were acknowledged by a faith that was incarnate in a total human life so they were experienced as demonstrations of a presence that was present in every situation.[43]

Secondly, however, the history in which revelation is perceived is history apprehended from a particular standpoint, the perspective of valuing, faith-ful selves seeking personal meaning. Revelation cannot be identified with an objectivistic Heilsgeschichte which understands revelation as occurring in certain events of the past as seen from the external point of view. This conception implies a God of the past who is no longer a living presence, and equates revelation with historical facticity. Niebuhr also dismissed this conception on the grounds that it results in a metaphysical dualism which denies the sovereignty of God over all of creation by distinguishing between sacred events in which God is present and secular events which are God-less.[44] Objectivism in revelation leads to "two systems of reality on the same plane -- a natural, historical, rational system and a supernatural, super-historical and super-rational system."[45] Niebuhr believed that the two-world thinking in which Christianity is involved necessitated some form of duality, but an epistemological duality which allows for ontological unity and therefore safeguards the sovereignty of God offers fewer problems than a metaphysical dualism.

A further difficulty with objectivistic Heilsgeschichte views is that they make revelation dependent on miracle. This threatens the sovereignty of God by the fact that it tends "to substitute belief in the occurrence of miraculous events for faith in God."[46] Moreover, the attempt to locate revelation in external history necessarily exempts revelatory events from scientific historical investigation, raising still further the question as to whether these events are genuinely historical.

Third, by locating revelation in inner history Niebuhr safeguards the personal quality of revelation both in terms of what is revealed (the person of God) and the response to revelation (a personally-transforming faith). As a mode of apprehension in which subject and object are not radically separated, inner history protects revelation from being identified with dogma or intellectual assent to propositions about God and man. The knowledge of revelation is not primarily propositional and therefore the mode of historical apprehension in which revelation occurs is a fundamentally personal mode of knowing. Propositional knowledge invites intellectual assent whereas personal apprehension invites trust and loyalty, and the latter is man's primary response to revelation. Cognitive knowledge is involved, but at a secondary level.

> Idea and proposition are not the right terms to employ here. The most important fact about the whole approach to revelation to which we are committed . . . is that we must think and speak in terms of persons. In our history we deal with selves, not with concepts. Our universals here are not eternal objects ingredient in events but eternal persons active in particular occasions; our axioms in this participating knowledge are not self-evident convictions about the relations of such objects but certainties about fundamental, indestructible, relations between persons.[47]

Finally, by locating revelation in internal history, Niebuhr protects its character as present reality as opposed to an event belonging solely to the past. We have seen how the past is present through memory, but the remembered event is not revelation apart from the present activity of God in us through faith. God speaks in the present through an event in the past that is present in us in our history.

> The God who reveals himself in Jesus Christ is now trusted and known as the contemporary God, revealing himself in every event; but we do not understand how we could trace his working in these happenings if he did not make himself known to us through the memory of Jesus Christ; nor do we know how we should be able to interpret all the words we read as words of God save by the aid of this Rosetta stone.[48]

Revelation as Transforming Power

As an event in internal history revelation asks not what ideas are disclosed but:"'What persons do we meet in the revelatory event and what convictions about personal relations become our established principles in its presence?'"[49] As we have seen, personal knowledge involves a reciprocal relationship between the self and the other. It is dependent, first, upon the activity of the other in revealing himself to us. But since what is revealed is himself in relation to us, the content of personal knowledge is not information about another but knowledge of ourselves in the light of and in relation to the other. In other words, in personal knowledge we cannot abstract knowledge of the other from knowledge of ourselves, in relationship with the other. A personal relationship is reflexive. Therefore what is revealed is personal in the double sense that it involves apprehending another as person and knowing myself in relationship with that other in such a way that I am a different person.

> Knowledge [of other selves] does not run from a subject to an object but from the other to the self and back again. We cannot know here save as we are known. We cannot be the doers but must first suffer knowledge of ourselves. To know a knower is to begin with the activity of the other who knows us or reveals himself to us by his knowing activity. . . . Knowledge of other selves must be received and responded to. Where there is no response it is evident that there is no knowledge. . . . Selves are known in act or not at all . . . "The Thou," [Buber] writes, "meets me through grace -- it is not found by seeking . . . The Thou meets me. But I step into direct relation to it. Hence the relationship means being chosen and choosing, suffering and action in one." Meeting with such a Thou, the I is changed. The self which is known by another and so knows itself through another's eyes is not an impersonal process of thinking . . . It is a self which . . . is caught fast and held in the act of the other's knowing of it. The self which is known and so achieves self-knowledge is a committed self -- an I which must acknowledge what it is and so accept itself. Such meetings with others are events in our history through which we not only know but become what we are.[50]

Revelation as transforming personal knowledge is dependent on the initiative of the other, but it involves a response of the self. That response begins in commitment to the other and involves self-understanding and self-constituting as a result of the relationship with the other. The formal nature of personal knowledge or revelation is this knowing, transforming relationship.

Because revelation includes knowledge of ourselves as persons theology has sometimes concluded that "the central certainty of Christianity is the conviction that human selves have infinite or sacred value."[51] Niebuhr rejects this view, however, on the grounds that it is idolatrous and that the worth of human personality is dependent upon an ultimate being to whom man is valuable.

Neither can revelation refer primarily to the person of Jesus. Again, the value of Jesus is dependent on a prior certainty, for apart from the activity and presence of God in Jesus, his life and fate point only to the fragility of human life and the illusion of human worth. The significance of Jesus is that he directs us beyond himself to God, and it is His person that we meet in revelation.

> Revelation means God, God who discloses himself to us through our history as our knower, our author, our judge and our only savior.[52]

The self-disclosure of God as an event in our history, then, may be described as the acknowledgement that the power behind the universe, the One beyond the many, is not Enemy but trustworthy Friend and Companion. Such an acknowledgement at the depths of my being issues in a transformation of my life in all its aspects. Revelation means "that moment when we are given a new faith"[53] which involves a fundamental reorientation of the self. Revelation's intrinsic value and self-authenticating element is this reattachment of the self's faith and concomitant transformation of its life. The revelatory event mediates an existential encounter with One who is the source of transformation of the self's values, knowledge and understanding.

> Revelation means the moment in our history through which we know ourselves to be known from beginning to end, . . . the moment in which we are surprised by the knowledge of someone there in the darkness and the void of human life; it means the self-disclosure of light in our darkness . . . Revelation means that we find ourselves to be valued rather than valuing and that all our values are transvaluated by the activity of a universal valuer.[54]

Revelation as Symbolic Perspective

Revelation has not only intrinsic value and self-evidencing transforming power; it also has an instrumental value and as such might be called a symbolic perspective on the whole of our historic experience. "Revelation means for us that part of our inner history which illuminates the rest of it and which is itself intelligible."[55] Revelation is an event that captures the imagination of a community in such a way as to change its self-interpretation and its understanding of the whole of reality.

Niebuhr had been struck by Whitehead's statement that "rational religion appeals to the direct intuition of special occasions, and to the elucidatory power of its concepts for all occasions."[56] Just as sometimes in struggling to understand a difficult book a particular sentence illumines the argument and enables us to understand both previous and subsequent pages, so "revelation means this intelligible event which makes all other events intelligible."[57]

Drawing upon Niebuhr's exposition of this point, Van Harvey suggests three implications that follow from this model. First, "there is the idea that certain concrete events or experiences have the capacity to bring a new orientation in thought. They impose, so to speak, a new perspective on us. . . . They call forth a new understanding or resolve."[58] This is not to beg the question of the creative role of the knower; it is simply to suggest that certain events "intrude certain questions and images upon us because they seem to touch human experience and feeling at some primordial level."[59] They provide certain suggestive and compelling symbols for our use in interpreting existence because they fuse, as it were, the universal and the particular.

Thus Harvey's second point is that an event is revelatory because it has a paradigmatic character. It is a particular event that strikes us as having wider or universal application. So Niebuhr can speak of the "life and death of Christ as a parable and an analogy"[60] through which we understand present experience. An image or symbol cast up by an event serves as a pattern where there was formerly only confusion and unintelligibility.

Third, the images of the revelatory event may be rationalized; concepts may be abstracted from them and general principles drawn about the nature and meaning of human historic existence. Niebuhr notes that it is always tempting to understand the doctrines so abstracted apart from their historical roots as universal rational ideas. The danger here is that revelation is identified "with the publication in an historic moment of great doctrines or ideas."[61] The conceptualization of images also gives rise to the dilemma that revelation apparently must refer to general concepts in which case it cannot mean particular events. Niebuhr suggests that this is a false dichotomy when we are dealing with an event that has helped to form our present understanding as well as serving as a guide to further understanding.

A similar criticism may arise when the revelatory event is understood as presenting images which constitute a symbolic perspective for our interpretation of experience. That is the criticism that the Christ event understood as symbolic begs the question of the historical actuality of the event. Niebuhr insists that it does not.

> For history may function as myth or as symbol when men use it . . . for understanding their present and their future. When we grasp our present, not so much as a product of our past, but more as essentially revealed in that past, then the historical account is necessarily symbolic; it is not merely descriptive of what was once the case. Thus, we observe today how in America the story of the Civil War functions among us symbolically without ceasing to be historic; with its aid we apprehend the structures of our national, historical existence. . . . For Christians it is at least as important to reject the thought that Jesus Christ is only an historical figure as it is to deny that he is only a symbol.[62]

We have previously noted that the reason depends on and uses certain basic images for its task of interpreting and organizing human experience. We have also noted the consequences of inadequate or evil images in reason's task. We have seen Niebuhr's insistence that the images of impersonal existence when employed to interpret personal life distort and misinterpret, that the images of polytheism result in a fragmented interpretation of existence, and that henotheism can at best offer images that enable the mind to interpret only a segment of life. Niebuhr maintains that the revelatory event meets the need for an adequate interpretative image with which reason may understand and organize the variety of human historic experience. He answers the problem of the relationship of reason and revelation by suggesting that revelation provides the images which reason employs in its task of interpretation. "Without revelation reason is limited and guided into error; without reason revelation illuminates only itself."[63]

From the symbolic perspective offered by the revelatory event, one is able to interpret both one's own past, present and future experience and that of the race. It "brings rationality and wholeness into the confused joys and sorrows of personal existence and allows us to discern order in the brawl of communal histories."[64]

As the illuminating image, revelation makes the apparently haphazard and meaningless events of the past intelligible and significant. For Christians the revelatory image of Jesus Christ is the means by which we understand the meaning of the events of Hebrew history and of Gentile history as preparation for the advent of the Savior. Further much that we have failed to acknowledge as part of our past is recalled and its significance revealed. Reasoning with the aid of the revelatory image helps us face forgotten and deceitful elements of our past as a means of overcoming their present consequences. Moreover, revelation causes us to appropriate as our own the history of other communities and indeed of the whole of mankind. So the Christian appropriates the history of the Jews as his own, but he also identifies with "all the struggles, searchings after light, all the wanderings of all the peoples, all the sins of men in all places."[65] The past that revelation helps to interpret is not the "dead past" but the past that has made us what we are, the past that lives in man's present existence and experience.

The interpretation and conscious appropriation of the past that the revelatory image makes possible is a means of self-understanding and of achieving community with mankind, without which personal integrity is impossible. As an historical being, formed and shaped by the past which has constituted us collectively and individually, man cannot achieve unity and wholeness apart from the understanding of himself in his historical relationships to all mankind which the interpretative image makes possible. As a being in the present, living in communities divided by historic conflicts, man cannot attain reconciliation and unity without the understanding, repentance and renewal which the reinterpretation and apprehension of the past makes possible.

Revelation also enables us to understand the present more significantly. In interpreting present experience, Niebuhr suggests that the image of Jesus Christ serves as both (a) parable and analogy and (b) rational image.[66] The former enables us to say what our experience is like while the latter offers concepts through which to explain contemporary action. Each method complements the other in helping us achieve greater adequacy of understanding.

Niebuhr himself used the life and death of Jesus Christ as a parable and analogy in interpreting the Second World War.

In a series of articles in the Christian Century he wrote of the war as an example of God's "redemptive justice in which suffering is used in the service of remaking."[67] Through the cross we understand that one facet of God's redemptive justice as it is carried on in history is judgment, understood not as punishment or vindictiveness but as "the corrective action of God who is loyal to his creatures."[68] The second facet of God's redemptive activity is the vicarious suffering of the innocent for all men, and in this sense war is "very much like the crucifixion."[69] For the cross confronts us with the "tragic consequences of moral failure" and reveals "the intense moral earnestness of a God who will not abandon mankind to self-destruction."[70] War represents "the moving sacrifice of our youth for the sake of that which they love; the sacrifice by parents of their best-loved sons. . . ."[71]

Niebuhr sees the cross as revealing "that the order of the universe is not one of retribution in which goodness is rewarded and evil punished, but rather an order of graciousness wherein, as Jesus observed, the sun is made to shine on evil and on good and the rain to descend on the just and the unjust."[72] Through this revelatory image Niebuhr finds that war too demonstrates the same gracious order of God, difficult though that may seem. For when we interpret the war from the standpoint of the cross we see the death of the guiltless and the gracious, and this "suffering of the innocent becomes a call to repentance, to a total revolution of our minds and hearts. And such a call . . . is an act of grace, a great recall from the road to death which we all travel together."[73] History is understood as the work of redemption, and the divine Historical Agent is working out his gracious purposes even in the horrors of war.

> Interpreted through the cross of Jesus Christ the suffering of the innocent is seen not as the suffering of temporal men but of the eternal victim "slain from the foundations of the world." If the Son of God is being crucified in this war along with malefactors -- and he is being crucified on many an obscure hill -- then the graciousness of God, the self-giving love, is more manifest here than in all the years of peace.[74]

The future in terms of inner history means our potentiality, and through revelation we seek to interpret the future possibilities of our lives, when what is now implicit will become explicit. Here we see death but also the possibility of resurrection, new life and a new community.

Thus revelation is the event-image which orders and gives meaning to other events in both world history and individual history. When events which had previously been devoid of personal meaning become meaningful, we might speak of what happens in terms of external history becoming converted to internal history. What had been known from the impersonal point of view as factual event understood only in relation to other events in their facticity, now becomes personally significant. Revelation offers a symbolic perspective with which to understand the whole of reality. This is possible because as the revelation of God, it is also the "revelation of the order of reality."[75]

> When we speak of revelation we mean that something has happened to us in our history which conditions all our thinking and that through this happening we are enabled to apprehend what we are, what we are suffering and doing and what our potentialities are. What is otherwise arbitrary and dumb fact becomes related, intelligible and eloquent fact through the revelatory event.[76]

Although we have discussed the formal nature of revelation under the two distinguishable facets of transforming power and symbolic perspective, we must note in conclusion that Niebuhr does not intend these to be separated. God's transforming power includes the conversion of our thinking and the conversion of the mind helps to effect the continual personal transformation that is involved in revelation. Again, Niebuhr understands human existence in a thoroughly dynamic and dialectical way.

The Verification of Revelation

The question, then, which faith asks of history is not so much whether faith's interpretation of the revelatory event corresponds to what happened, but whether the images cast up by the event are adequate for understanding human historical experience. The former is a belief about a past event and as such has no immediacy and no more significance than any other belief about a past event. The latter is a belief that an event in the past has provided us with the symbols which illumine our experience in both scope and depth. This, however, raises the question of validation: How can we be sure that the images given us are adequate? What criteria can be brought to bear to test whether what we acknowledge as revelation is truly God's revelation?

Niebuhr's answer to this problem is two-fold. On the one hand, he seems to suggest that revelation is in some sense self-authenticating; as a fundamental faith, a first principle, it requires no further justification than its own intrinsic certitude. As personal encounter with the First Person, revelation is its own validation.

> The first value of revelation as of the kingdom is intrinsic and we begin with it not because it will lead to further knowledge but because it is itself the truth . . . In dealing with revelation we refer to something in our history to which we always return as containing our first certainty. It is our "*cogito, ergo sum*," though it must be stated in the opposite way as, "I am being thought, therefore I am," or, "I am being believed in, therefore I believe."[77]

Revelation is an event that is both intelligible in itself and that makes other events intelligible, and without intrinsic intelligibility it would have no instrumental value. On the other hand, the dialectic of human existence is such that revelation is confirmed as God's revelation only through its "fruits." "Assurance grows out of immediate perception plus social corroboration and out of neither of these alone."[78]

Thus, on the other hand, the meaning of revelation is inseparable from its value as transforming symbolic perspective. The meaning of revelation becomes clearer and richer to us as we apply its images to our historical experience. In this process we gradually recognize how profoundly revelation illumines life and are made aware of its validity by this "pragmatic" test. Indeed the enrichment of life by revelation as a perspective is itself God's continuing revelation. We do not really know what is in the revelatory moment until we employ its suggestions as a symbolic perspective on all experience. Niebuhr's realistic anthropology is evident here as he views the confirmation of revelation by the dialectic that moves from revelation to reason to experience and back again to revelation. The process of course is never concluded, for we never fully apprehend the meaning of revelation and God never ceases to reveal himself.

As intrinsic truth and symbolic perspective, revelation transforms all our conceptions of the moral life, of God, and of ourselves and our relationships. Niebuhr's conversionism represents his refusal to identify revelation with the progressive development of man's life and thought without at the same time repudiating creation; it enables him to affirm the realm of nature as well as the sphere of grace. However, we must defer the treatment of this motif to the next chapter.

These latter points lead us from the abstract analysis of revelation to the question of the material content of historic revelation. What are the images which the revelatory event elicits, what changes does it effect in man's basic relationship and how can we speak of that event as decisive within the context of historical relativism? After we have dealt with Niebuhr's treatment of these problems we will be able to give a final and fuller evaluation and summary of his contribution to the faith-history discussion, the burden of our concluding chapter.

A Critique and Assessment of Niebuhr's Understanding of History and Revelation

Niebuhr has made the case eloquently for an understanding of revelation as apprehended through a particular perspective or relationship to events rather than by virtue of the events in themselves. This locating of revelation in internal history means that revelation is not identical with factual occurrences and therefore that revelation as such does not lie within the domain of scientific historical reconstruction. Moreover, Jesus Christ is not "merely an historical figure" in the sense that he belongs to a dead past. When actual events are the question, however, a factual dimension is involved inescapably, for "fact" simply refers to historical actuality as opposed to fiction. And where historical fact is concerned, scientific historical research as the modern systematic method of inquiry into historical actuality is necessarily involved. Thus the theologian must confront the question of the relationship of historical fact and meaning, of scientific history and revelatory history.

Niebuhr's discussion of the three-fold relationship of internal and external history represents his attempt to answer this problem. But that discussion is somewhat ambiguous and its high level of abstraction prevents a very clear indication of the relationship between fact and meaning. The failure to be more precise at this point is a weakness in Niebuhr's formal historical methodology. However, taken as a whole, Niebuhr's theology does offer, we believe, some important suggestions regarding the general direction of a working resolution of that problem. In the following discussion we shall be dealing with the question in a more specific way than Niebuhr did, but we believe that we shall simply be making explicit what is implicit in his thought.

One of the ways in which the fact-meaning problem is sometimes posed revolves around the statement that faith must be independent of all factual historical knowledge. Otherwise the radicality of faith is compromised, and faith becomes mere intellectual assent to factual propositions rather than personal trust and loyalty. Niebuhr of course agrees with this statement insofar as it affirms that faith is trust in God, not belief about what happened. However, his understanding of the reciprocity between faith and noetic affirmations would suggest that faith involves some essentially factual assertions about the nature of Jesus' life, teachings, and death. So also in its reflections on the content of faith, theology depends on factual statements about the nature of the life which serves as a paradigm of trust and loyalty. We have suggested that one of the intentions of Niebuhr's abstract discussion of the relations between internal and external history is precisely to point to this reciprocity between fact and meaning while maintaining that the revelatory power or meaning of an event is not to be found on the level of impersonal factual information.

Because of the relative character of historical knowledge, some theologians have suggested that we cannot speak of historical facts at all, but only of the meaning of events as interpreted from different perspectives. Some of these same men have also maintained that the meaning of events is best understood by those who have a particular appreciation of them or who are most involved with them.[79] We have noted that Niebuhr has consistently refused to make this apologetic claim.

It is true that we cannot totally separate fact from meaning, and it is true that historical judgments are a function of the perspective of the knower, but it is wrong to infer from this that we cannot distinguish between historical fact and meaning. The term fact points to "the obligation of the historian to find a genuine ground in historical actuality for the meaning he asserts."[80] History is distinguished from fiction by virtue of its being rooted in factuality, and it is possible to abstract the meaning(s) of an event from the sheer fact of its occurrence. The death of Martin Luther King meant different things to different people, but one can still speak of the fact apart from its implications. It would seem that those who hold that we cannot use the term fact with respect to history are using fact to refer to events as they really were, in which case of course we do not have access to positive factual knowledge. But that definition is not necessary or possible with respect to history.

There are really only two questions that theology must be concerned about with respect to the relationship between fact and meaning in history. The first is whether the theologian provides for an adequate grounding of revelation in historical actuality, and the second is whether his understanding of the meaning and content of Christian faith demands questionable historical judgments. First, then, we must ask whether Niebuhr so separates fact and meaning, external and internal history, that it becomes dubious whether the meaning of events is rooted in actual history, the dimension which "fact" denotes. Hans Frei apparently believes that in his methodological work in The Meaning of Revelation Niebuhr does just that, for he writes that "there appears to be in this book no underlying vision of the unity of historical thought from which both types of reflection spring."[81] We have argued that such is not the case because of the threefold relationship that Niebuhr finds to obtain between internal and external history, but also by virtue of the fact that internal history represents the early church's perspectival interpretation of actual events. It is a relative grasp of events, but it is an objective relativism that is genuinely related to the historical object. It is not, in other words, fanciful or imaginary or fictional; it is a response to events from a personal standpoint. The whole force of Niebuhr's argument is to insist that internal history is a valid kind of perspective on events. When Niebuhr says that internal history is related to external history in the form of "embodiment," he is telling us that internal history is based on actual occurrences. "Though we cannot point to what we mean by revelation by directing attention to the historic facts as embodied and as regarded from without, we can have no continuing inner history through which to point without embodiment."[82]

Secondly, if faith is not assent to historical propositions but is grounded in historical actuality, the real issue for theology is whether faith "requires certain specific historical assertions that, in the nature of the case, are dubious or not fully justified."[83]

> Some historical judgments require more of a risk than others. It is one thing to stake one's faith on the veracity of the story of the three wise men, another on the messianic consciousness of Jesus, still another on his crucifixion.[84]

Faith and fact, theology and scientific history can collide only if the theologian attempts to rest his case on questionable historical assertions.

It is our contention that Niebuhr avoids such a collision between fact and faith by his insistence that internal history must "incorporate" the insights of external history in the sense of disinterested history in such a way as to correct its vision where that vision arises out of unjustifiable historical assertions. It will become more evident in the next chapter that Niebuhr does not rely on dubious historical assertions in his interpretation of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

In nothing that we have said is it implied that faith or revelation are equatable with historical facticity or that there is a direct line from the establishment of certain historical facts to faith. Internal history, the sphere of faith, is based on "a decision of the self, a leap of faith."[85] But it is not divorced from historical actuality, and actual events are both the basis for the personal apprehension of faith and the basis of the impersonal knowledge of the scientific historian. Niebuhr recognized that faith and fact cannot be totally separated, and he attempted to provide in an abstract way for their interaction without making either a function or determinant of the other.

This position can be maintained so far as the life, teachings, and death of Jesus are concerned, but it becomes troublesome when we are dealing with the resurrection. Niebuhr, as we have seen, views the resurrection as crucial, for it is God's demonstration of faithfulness to the one who trusted Him utterly. Yet Niebuhr does not affirm a physical resurrection.[86] Apparently then, the factual element in the resurrection is the fact of the Christians' faith in the risen Lord. But this is another meaning of facticity, a meaning more akin to Kaehler's and to that enunciated by Richard R. Niebuhr[87] where historical "fact" is roughly equivalent to the lasting influence of an event. There is a sense in which historical significance is a fact of history, but to allow this sense to exhaust the meaning of fact is a dubious matter.

However, it can be argued that the resurrection by its very nature cannot and need not be grounded in historical fact in the usual (the historian's) sense. For if the claim was made that the resurrection was a factual (physical) event, it would be difficult if not impossible to avoid the position of seeing a factual proposition as giving rather persuasive objective support of a miraculous nature to faith, since a resurrection is not an ordinary "natural" occurrence. This would violate the radicality of faith as well as the necessity of maintaining that revelation is apprehended through a personal relationship to events. In other words, by its very nature as an extraordinary event, a factual resurrection connotes objective certainty or verification as does no other event. If the theologian asserts it as fact, he not only finds himself in collision with most historians, but he also jeopardizes the nature of faith as trust in God rather than belief in a miracle. Thus he finds himself impaled on the horns of a dilemma.

The alternative is to understand the resurrection as an assessment of faith, and that is what Niebuhr does. For Niebuhr certainly did not mean to suggest that in the resurrection God demonstrates his trustworthiness in a way that is ascertainable by a disinterested approach to history. Rather, he is suggesting that faith in the trustworthiness of God includes the assurance that Jesus Christ is present among men as risen Lord, for God will let no one down. This is not a deduction drawn from a factual event, but the result of trust in the graciousness of God. It does not reason from fact to meaning; it believes from faith to faith.

> It is not a question of believing certain men or writings which assert that God raised him from the dead on the third day. We do not trust the God of faith because we believe that certain writings are trustworthy. Yet it is our conviction that God is faithful, that He kept faith with Jesus Christ who was loyal to Him and to his brothers; that Christ is risen from the dead; that as the Power is faithful so Christ's faithfulness is powerful.[88]

One of the reasons behind the fact-meaning problem is theology's attempt to find some means of verification for the insights of faith. It was the genius of the dialectical theology to insist, in response to modern historical research as well as to the Pauline doctrine of justification, that faith is less than radical if it requires objective certainty. At this point Niebuhr certainly concurs, as is evident in his insistence that faith is not assent to historical (or doctrinal) propositions. However, the radicality of faith does not mean that it has no relation to historical fact as we have tried to point out, nor does it mean that we cannot speak of "verification" in some sense. Niebuhr's view of revelation as involving a symbolic perspective evoked by images suggested by an event represents a way of grounding faith in historical actuality without making faith equivalent to the assertions of historical research. For the question of verification becomes not whether we can demonstrate that the New Testament picture of Jesus conforms to the actual Jesus, but whether the New Testament image illumines present experience adequately. Faith is not verified by scientific history establishing facticity, but by the "pragmatic" test of faith's value for present experience.

Nevertheless, the power of the interpretative image is to some extent a function of the degree to which the image reflects actuality, the factual dimension of the event. The closer the correspondence of image and fact the better. Therefore we have interpreted Niebuhr to mean that internal history continually tests its claims with the findings of scientific history, not for verification but for accuracy.

In summary, faith and fact are distinguishable spheres involving differing kinds of assessments, but a faith that is based on historical actuality must take into account the factual dimension of scientific history. Scientific historical reconstruction is not determinative of the content of internal history, but it is not for that reason irrelevant to internal history, for it assists the theologian to distinguish between the more and less reliable aspects of the tradition, enabling him to base his theological interpretation on the more dependable records. The importance of Niebuhr's understanding of history is his recognition that "the Christians' insights lie at a different level [than facticity], at the level of the kinds of significance one attaches to these events which are otherwise known in the way any event can be known."[89] His theory is important, not only for its recognition of two distinguishable modes of historical apprehension, but also for its insistence on a meaningful relationship between them and its refusal to resolve their dialectical tension by reducing one to the other or by a premature synthesis of the two. The very nature of man which leads to Christianity's "two-world" thinking makes a simpler solution of this complex problem questionable.

> Since the time of Aristotle philosophers have distinguished between the sort of reasoning we do in knowing the objects of the intellect and the kind we do in choosing between important and unimportant, more and less valuable modes of action; and to many of them it has seemed that there is no way of uniting systematically in a single theory these ways of reasoning. Only the individual self that both knows and acts provides an unintellectualizable or at least unconceptualizable unity to these various processes.[90]

Harvey, however, has also criticized Niebuhr on the grounds that his division of historical apprehension into two perspectives is an oversimplification resulting in ambiguities in the meaning of internal and external history. Perspectives, he maintains, involve many elements; they are "field-encompassing."[91] As a result several different perspectives are possible with respect to historical events depending on the questions one is asking of the event, one's purposes and values, and so on. To limit historical apprehension to only two standpoints is too restrictive and misleading in Harvey's estimation.

Moreover, Harvey notes that in Niebuhr's usage external history has at least three somewhat different meanings.[92] In the first place, it is disinterested history, involving the perspective of the historian seeking knowledge of what happened and abstracting as much as possible from personal values and commitments. As such, external history refers to scientific history, and it is this sense that we have maintained is Niebuhr's primary reference.

In the second place, external history refers to events as apprehended from perspectives other than the Christian; external history in this sense means all alien internal histories, not all of which of course are disinterested. We have noted Niebuhr's use of this sense in the discussion of the incorporation of external histories within internal history. Several problems arise in conjunction with this usage of the term. First, what does it mean to internalize an alien internal history, and, indeed, how can we do so when Niebuhr suggests that we cannot enter into other inner histories without abandoning our own? We have interpreted Niebuhr to mean that we use the insights of other perspectives in a self-critical way, but this is to presuppose that we have the capacity to transcend our own position sufficiently to enable us to understand another viewpoint, a capacity which Niebuhr elsewhere also insists upon. Moreover, Niebuhr seems momentarily to abandon his relativism when he speaks of the duty of Christians to see themselves through the eyes of God, who sees simultaneously from within and from without. In this somewhat confusing discussion, it would seem that Niebuhr's point is a simple and basic one, namely, that it is imperative that one take seriously the views of other communities than one's own lest one become complacent, self-righteous, and pretentious.

The third meaning of external history is "embodiment" or objective occurrence. Internal history is a response to actual events. For the Christian, it represents a response on the part of the early Christian community to the "flesh and blood" event which had called it into being and a response of the Christian community of all times and places to that event as remembered and interpreted by the first community.

These criticisms suggest a lack of clarification and precision on Niebuhr's part rather than a substantial problem. He can speak of external history in all three senses at once because all represent history that is other than Christian internal history, but he should have been more precise in delineating the relations between internal history and each sense of external history. The validity of the two aspects theory lies in the fact that it simply points out that (a) historical apprehension is a function of the intentionality of the interpreter, and (b) every relationship to history seems to be predominantly either personal or impersonal. Niebuhr is appropriating and modifying the views of Dilthey and Collingwood who insisted that historical events unlike natural events have an "inside" and an "outside."[93] Niebuhr is simply insisting on the validity of one kind of "inside" relationship to history, one that asks of historical events the question of ultimate meaning and values for selves. In so doing he is suggesting that it is only through the medium of historical events that men can find some answer to the question of personal nature and destiny. Niebuhr is an "historicist" in the sense that he believes that the ontological foundations of our deepest beliefs and values are in history and have emerged from certain crucial events which have shaped our present existence decisively. Moreover, the particular values, convictions, and ideas which each man acknowledges have come to him through the history of a particular community, and because he shares that community's history he apprehends its beliefs as true. This abstract understanding would seem to apply to all men, for all men live by some faith which they have learned in a particular community of faith. Moreover, the history of each community would seem to involve certain particular events by which that community's faith was formed and out of which it developed. Those events were understood as being especially illuminating, as events in which the center of value and the object of ultimate loyalty was disclosed. The meaning suggested by those events continues to live on in the deepest level of one's being as the symbols through which one understands his own identity as well as all the myriad events in his personal and social history.

This formal understanding of history and revelation represents a new conceptual framework for understanding the nature of faith's relationship to historical events, a framework that avoids the misconceptions fostered by previous treatments of that relationship. However, the test of a formal method is its material results. Christian faith points to the event of Jesus Christ as its decisive revelatory moment, and we must now explicate Niebuhr's interpretation of the nature and meaning of that event.

NOTES

[1] MR, p. 59.

[2] If a solution or resolution of the problem of how revelation can mean both God and history involves a way out of two-world thinking either by a higher synthesis or by a reduction of one world to the other, Niebuhr cannot be said to have resolved the problem. What he did was to clarify the nature of what was involved and to point to the unity-in-duality as well as duality-in-unity that he believed could not be transcended.

[3] See supra, pp. 99-102.

[4] MR, p. 59 et passim.

[5] Ibid., p. 59.

[6] Ibid., p. 65.

[7] Ibid., p. 64.

[8] Ibid., p. 66.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid., p. 60.

[11] Ibid., pp. 60f.

[12] Ibid., pp. 61-62.

[13] Ibid., p. 67.

[14] Ibid., p. 68.

[15] Ibid., p. 69.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Cf. Ibid., p. 117 and supra, pp. 92-93 and infra, pp. 172-74. The last reference is a discussion of Niebuhr's concept of memory.

[18] It should be noted that Niebuhr was indebted to Augustine (Confessions, Books X and XI) and Bergson for his view of time. For a clear and succinct discussion of the thought of these men on the subject of time, see James M. Gustafson, Treasure in Earthen Vessels (New York: Harper & Bros., 1961), pp. 113-137, esp. 117ff.

[19] MR, p. 70.

[20] Ibid., p. 71.

[21] Ibid., p. 65.

[22] Ibid., p. 61.

[23] Ibid., p. 79.

[24] Ibid., p. 80.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid., p. 72.

[27] Ibid., p. 73.

[28] Ibid., p. 83.

[29] Ibid., p. 90.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid., p. 87.

[32] Ibid., p. 89.

[33] Ibid., p. 90.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Frei, p. 78.

[36] I am indebted for much of the following discussion to Gustafson, pp. 72-85. Gustafson indicates that his reflection on the idea of a common memory began upon reading MR (cf. Gustafson, p. 73, n. 2). He also acknowledges his indebtedness to Josiah Royce, Max Weber and Wilhelm Dilthey (cf. Gustafson, pp. 72-73). Niebuhr's understanding of memory is of course also Augustinian and it is also indebted to Bergson.

[37] Gustafson, p. 72.

[38] Ibid., p. 74.

[39] Royce understands a community as that which is constituted by either a common memory or a common hope. See The Problem of Christianity (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1914), II, 36-53.

[40] I am indebted here to the useful distinctions made by Will Herberg, "Five Meanings of the Word 'Historical,'" The Christian Scholar, XLVII, 4 (Winter, 1964), pp. 327-330. I have modified Herberg's categories somewhat in order to apply them to Niebuhr's thought.

[41] Ibid., p. 327.

[42] Ibid.

[43] RMWC, p. 44.

[44] Cf. MR, pp. 74ff. and H. Richard Niebuhr, "Is God in the War?" The Christian Century, LIX (August 5, 1942), pp. 953-55.

[45] MR, p. 75.

[46] Ibid., p. 76.

[47] Ibid., p. 143.

[48] Ibid., p. 154.

[49] Ibid., p. 143.

[50] Ibid., pp. 145-46.

[51] Ibid., p. 150.

[52] Ibid., p. 152.

[53] Ibid., p. 154.

[54] Ibid., pp. 152-53.

[55] Ibid., p. 93.

[56] A. N. Whitehead, Religion in the Making, quoted in MR, p. 93.

[57] MR, p. 93.

[58] Van A. Harvey, The Historian and the Believer (New York; The Macmillan Co., 1966), p. 253.

[59] Ibid., p. 254.

[60] MR, p. 124. See infra, pp. 187-88, for a brief discussion of Niebuhr's use of this principle with respect to war.

[61] Ibid., p. 126.

[62] RS, pp. 156-57. Niebuhr goes on to note parenthetically that "the phrase 'only a symbol' usually betrays lack of understanding of the power and importance of symbolic forms in our lives, since symbols are essential ingredients of the world in which we live. Without symbols nothing has intelligibility and form for us. Without them we grope in darkness." (Ibid., p. 157.)

[63] MR, p. 121.

[64] Ibid., p. 109.

[65] Ibid., p. 116.

[66] Ibid., pp. 124ff.

[67] H. Richard Niebuhr, "War as the Judgment of God," The Christian Century, LIX (May 13, 1942), p. 631.

[68] Niebuhr, "Is God in the War?" p. 953.

[69] H. Richard Niebuhr, "War as Crucifixion," The Christian Century, LX (April 28, 1943), p. 514.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ibid., p. 515.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Ibid.

[76] MR, p. 138.

[77] Ibid., pp. 139-40.

[78] Ibid., p. 141.

[79] Van Harvey, pp. 204-221, discusses this approach under the rubric of "hard perspectivism," and he refers specifically to Alan Richardson's Christian Apologetics as representative of this view. He also mentions C. H. Dodd and John Knox as occasionally holding this position. This part of the fact-meaning discussion is indebted to Harvey's treatment.

[80] Gordon Kaufman, Systematic Theology, p. 270, n. 6.

[81] Frei, p. 30.

[82] MR, pp. 89-90.

[83] Harvey, p. 249.

[84] Ibid., p. 250.

[85] MR, p. 83.

[86] Cf. *RS*, p. 177, and *CC*, pp. 254-55.

[87] Richard R. Niebuhr, *Resurrection and Historical Reason* (New York: Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1957). Cf. also Van Harvey's refutation of this position in the article, "On Believing What is Difficult to Understand: A Dialogue." (*Journal of Religion*, XXXIX, 4 [October, 1959], pp. 219-231.)

[88] *CC*, pp. 254-55.

[89] Harvey, *Historian and Believer*, p. 242.

[90] *RMWC*, p. 127.

[91] Harvey, *Historian and Believer*, p. 242.

[92] *Ibid*., pp. 238-39. The remainder of this discussion draws heavily upon Harvey's criticism.

[93] Collingwood, pp. 213ff.

CHAPTER VI

CHRISTOLOGY AND REVELATION: THE MATERIAL ELEMENT OF HISTORY

In the final analysis, the theological problem of history is largely a Christological problem asking the questions: How do we apprehend the historical event of Jesus Christ? What can historical-theological understanding say about the person of Jesus Christ? How does that event affect the present? We have already seen Niebuhr's answer to the first of these questions and to some extent to the third. We must now ask the question about the person of Jesus Christ and then complete Niebuhr's answer to the question of present experience via the traditional category of the "work" of Jesus Christ.

The Person of Jesus Christ

Methodological Basis: the Jesus Christ of Internal History.

In Part I we noted that in response to modern historical method much twentieth century theology has tended to lose sight of Jesus as a concrete historical person. It has stressed instead the kerygma or the meaning of Jesus Christ as the supra-historical Word made flesh. Hans Frei has called this reluctance to describe the historical person a kind of "methodological or epistemological monophysitism."[1] We have noted the separation of the "Jesus of history" from the "Christ of faith" that has resulted, the bifurcation of historical research from theological method and content, and the related problem of the breach between the realm of nature and that of grace, all of which are involved in one way or another in the failure to take seriously enough the full historical humanity of Jesus Christ.

A further implication of the neglect of the historical object was the reduction of Christology to a doctrine of the work of Christ, which implies the question of authenticity. That is, how is it possible to distinguish between the work of Christ and the work of an alien spirit if we are not able to test the work or effects of Christ by our understanding of the person?

Finally, the lack of a doctrine of the person of Jesus Christ was due not only to historical skepticism and uncertainty, but also to the way in which the divine-human union in his person was understood. Schleiermacher and much of nineteenth century theology, as we have seen, inferred a kind of organic psychological point of unity in the inner recesses of consciousness. The difficulty with this view is that since that union is prior to all knowing and acting, it is not directly related to any concrete or objective moral, historical deeds, and it is empty of conceptual content. As Frei asks, "How, then, can one have an explicit Christology?"[2]

The major methodological problem for Christology that H. Richard Niebuhr inherited, then, was the problem of establishing historical grounds for affirming a doctrine of the person of Jesus Christ that was consistent with historical method and with Chalcedonian Christology. Niebuhr's perspectival conception of internal history provides the essential instrument for accomplishing this task. As a perspectival interpretation of history, internal history cuts through the dichotomy between the historical Jesus "behind" the sources and an historical skepticism that denies the validity of historical reconstruction and relies on the "Christ of faith," thus begging the question of historical actuality.

Niebuhr's understanding of the person of Jesus Christ is thus based on "the Jesus Christ of the New Testament"[3] known to the Christian community through its internal history. The Jesus Christ of the New Testament represents the early Christian community's perspectival memory-impression[4] of the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth. It is that image which the Christian community of all times and places appropriates in its own memory and which informs and shapes its self-understanding. The Jesus Christ of the New Testament is both a real "person with definite teachings, a definite character, and a definite fate,"[5] and he is risen Lord, the meaning of whose presence in our contemporary existence corresponds to the meaning of his original historical life. He is "one and the same whether he appears as man of flesh and blood or as risen Lord."[6] Niebuhr rejects the dichotomy between the "historical Jesus" and the "Christ of faith;" for internal history there is one Jesus Christ of history and of faith because the personal perspective of the New Testament represents an authentic form of historical apprehension. It is relativism, but it is objective relativism. A distinction of Van Harvey's is helpful to clarify this point.

Harvey distinguishes between four possible meanings of "Jesus of Nazareth."[7] First, there is Jesus "as he really was," which because of the nature of historical knowledge and because of the limitations of the sources we have with respect to Jesus is not recoverable and therefore is not a possible object of knowledge for us. Second, there is the "historical Jesus" or Jesus as recoverable by modern scientific historiography. This of course represents an historical reconstruction made from a disinterested point of view and corresponds to Niebuhr's principal meaning of external history. Harvey argues that despite disagreement in some details there is sufficient agreement among historians to speak of "what can be fairly said"[8] about Jesus on the basis of the sources.

Third, there is the perspectival image of Jesus Christ or the "memory-impression of Jesus"[9] as remembered and recorded by the early Christian community. This of course corresponds to Niebuhr's internal history. The perspectival image of Jesus is a highly selective and interpretive picture, but there is no reason to conclude that what it preserves is erroneous or fantastic. On the contrary, Harvey argues that there is every historical warrant for assuming that this image of Jesus is a trustworthy one, that is, that it does "have some real correlation with the historical Jesus and the actual Jesus."[10] A perspectival image is not necessarily untrue or distorted because it was not factually accurate in every detail or because it did not employ the canons of scientific historiography.

The fourth possible meaning of Jesus is "the Biblical Christ," that is, "the transformation and alteration of the memory-impression (or perspectival image) under the influence of the theological interpretation of the actual Jesus by the Christian community."[11] The Biblical Christ includes some of the more legendary and dogmatic accretions, such as the notion of pre-existence, the birth narratives, the temptation stories, many of the miracles, and so forth. The Johannine writings in particular represent this tradition. Harvey maintains that the historical warrants for affirming a close correlation between the Biblical Christ and the actual or historical Jesus are far more questionable than in the case of the memory image.

By virtue of both his abstract theory of history and his material doctrine of the person of Jesus Christ, it is clear that Niebuhr's Jesus Christ of New Testament internal history corresponds closely to the perspectival image of Jesus rather than to the Biblical Christ. On formal grounds this is seen in the fact that internal history is concerned with personal meaning rather than with mythological speculation. On material grounds, as we shall see, Niebuhr bases his interpretation of Jesus Christ on the more reliable elements of the synoptic picture of Jesus' life and teachings than on the more historically questionable documents.

The distinction between the internal historical image of Jesus Christ and the external historical understanding might be compared to the differences between a portrait and a photograph.[12] A photograph recaptures the precise factual details whereas a portrait will sacrifice scientific exactitude "in order to arrive at a symbolic expression of the total character of [the] subject. . . . A really great portrait will . . . symbolize not only the transcendent personality of the subject, but will contain suggestions of a universal human mood."[13] The correlation of the perspectival image of Jesus Christ with the historical and the actual Jesus is important only as it reinforces the power of the image to elicit radically monotheistic faith, for faith is not the belief that the New Testament image of Jesus is historically accurate; faith is the confidence that Jesus' witness is a true one.

Internal history includes not only the New Testament perspectival image, but the whole Biblical and historical context in which that event is set and the history of the church's interpretation of that event. Niebuhr's hermeneutic involves a continual dialogue between the interpreter and the entire history which surrounds the key event. In this creative task, the Scriptures are crucial but their significance is not found so much in their factual accuracy as in the power of their witness to the eternal _Logos_ ascertainable in _mythos_.

> [The church] must return again and again to the Jesus of history and to the history without which Jesus is unintelligible, to the law and the prophets, the apostles and evangelists. As the church explicates its faith it becomes aware of the fact that its loyalty is not to the Jesus of history only, nor to the risen Christ alone, but to the eternal Son of God incarnate in Jesus. But whether or not it is clear about the nature of the Christ who is its companion, in any case it cannot know the mind of this Christ without dependence on the historical Jesus and therefore on the Scripture.[14]

The Moral Image of Jesus Christ

Niebuhr describes the person of Jesus Christ in terms of three images or symbolic forms. The first of these is the image of the moral virtues which Jesus "exemplifies in his own life and which . . . he communicates to his followers."[15] The second is the image of Jesus Christ as the incarnation of radical faith, and the third is the symbol of universal responsibility. The radical sovereignty of God as perceived and communicated by Jesus Christ is the motif that unites these three descriptions.

Niebuhr insists by way of a caveat that no conceptual representation can adequately express the nature of a person, but he maintains that "if we cannot say anything adequately, we can at least say some things inadequately."[16] He also suggests that there are a number of ways of describing Jesus Christ, and that all are necessary complements to each other.[17] Moreover, he reminds us that all that is said about Jesus Christ is relative to the standpoint of the one who undertakes the description. But he reasserts his "objective relativism" by adding: "Though every description is an interpretation, it can be an interpretation of the objective reality."[18]

Niebuhr's description of Jesus Christ in moral terms focuses on five virtues which recent theological and historical works have emphasized, beginning with liberalism's stress on love. Niebuhr corrects the notion that Jesus proclaimed love as a virtue in and of itself; rather Jesus exhibited and demanded "love of God and of the neighbor in God."[19] God alone is worthy of love; He alone is ultimate object of devotion to Jesus. Niebuhr objects to liberalism's identification of love and God as well as to the unthinking view that man is intrinsically worthy of love. For Jesus love of God and love of neighbor are "two distinct virtues that have no common quality but only a common source."[20]

> The love of God is nonpossessive Eros; the love of man pure Agape; the love of God is passion; the love of man, compassion. There is duality here, but not of like-minded interest in two great values, God and man. It is rather the duality of the Son of Man and Son of God, who loves God as man should love Him, and loves man as only God can love.[21]

Jesus is not so much characterized by the virtue of love as he is by his absolute devotion to God. "It was not love but God that filled his soul," and thus one can say that "his love was that of the Son of God."[22]

Here we see Niebuhr's Chalcedonian Christology, but it takes the form not of two "natures" but of the quality of his two basic relationships. The quality of his relationship to man is Godlike; the quality of his relationship to God is like what man's ought to be.

Niebuhr treats the virtue of hope in similar manner. He commends the eschatologists, especially Schweitzer, for calling attention to this quality of Jesus' life and teaching, but he criticizes them for making Jesus' hope into a dogma about the end-time of history. His hope was not in the imminent metamorphosis of nature (human and nonhuman) but "in God and for God."[23] Jesus" radical hope and expectancy were grounded in his faith in and love for God, not in his view of history. His understanding of the kingdom of God is less a kind of utopian future than it is simply the rule of God who is both Now and Then. "Not eschatology but sonship to God is the key to Jesus' ethics."[24] Again, it is the radicality of Jesus' relationship to God that Niebuhr regards as central to his person.

Likewise, the existentialists' characterization of Jesus in terms of radical obedience, while pointing to an important aspect of his life, cannot be made decisive. Bultmann's understanding of Jesus' radical obedience seems to be devoid of any real content, and similarly, the idea of God which Bultmann ascribes to Jesus is "as empty and formal as the idea of obedience. Just as for liberalism God is the counterpart of human love, so in this existentialism He becomes the mere counterpart of moral decision."[25] For Niebuhr Jesus' radical obedience is to God, the Creator and Governor of all nature and history, the author of the ten commandments, the One who requires not only obedience to himself but also love of the neighbor.

Faith and humility are other moral excellences in Jesus' character; they are not self-contained qualities but relations to persons. Jesus' faith is faith in God; his humility is humility before God, absolute dependence upon Him.

Niebuhr concludes his discussion of the person of Jesus Christ understood in moral terms by suggesting that the excellence of his character and the "extremism and sublimity of this person . . . is due to that unique devotion to God and to that single-hearted trust in Him which can be symbolized by no other figure of speech so well as by the one which calls him Son of God."[26] It is his relationship to God that makes him extraordinary; it is what Niebuhr later calls his "radical faith" that makes him unique.

Therefore to believe in Jesus is to believe in God. He points beyond himself to the one whom he calls Father. It is God to which the moral virtues of Jesus point, and thus Niebuhr has used his "moral" delineation of Jesus as the basis for a restatement in contemporary terms of Chalcedonian Christology.

> No one can know the Son without acknowledging the Father. To be related in devotion and obedience to Jesus Christ is to be related to the One to whom he undeviatingly points. As Son of God he points away from the many values of man's social life to the One who alone is good . . .[27]

On the other hand, because he is one with the Father, he is perfect man who loves men and is faithful in all his dealings with his fellows. He is the moral mediator of God's will toward men.

> Because he loves the Father with the perfection of human eros, therefore he loves men with the perfection of divine agape, since God is agape. Because he is obedient to the Father's will, therefore he exercises authority over men, commanding obedience not to his own will but to God's. Because he hopes in God, therefore he gives promises to men. Because he trusts perfectly in God who is faithful, therefore he is trustworthy in his own faithfulness towards men . . .[28]

The radical nature of his relationship to God enables Jesus Christ to be a mediator involved in a double movement -- "with men toward God, with God toward men."[29] His relationship to God is that of man at his best; his relationship to man is Godlike. As a living person, he is engaged in the constant movements of the dynamic relationships to both God and man, but each relationship has its own quality and thrust. He is "fully God" and "fully man" and yet one person. Niebuhr has resymbolized two natures Christology in the category of dynamic personal and social relationships. Jesus Christ is "a single person wholly directed in his unity with the Father toward men."[30]

As Frei has noted, the gains for Christology in Niebuhr's moral interpretation are considerable. In addition to the reinterpretation of the two natures as just indicated, Niebuhr's approach tends to shift the emphasis away from a psychological interpretation with its ineffable core of personhood to a more concrete understanding of the self.[31] Implicit in Niebuhr's discussion of the person of Christ is a view that the inner person is genuinely and adequately expressed or embodied in his words and deeds. Words and acts represent the full, real, essential self; there is no substratum or inner core that is unexpressed in moral, historical acts. Niebuhr's philosophical roots are American empirical realism rather than German idealism. Therefore, the unity of the person of Jesus Christ is not dependent on the inference of a messianic self-consciousness. This psychological understanding "is not involved in [Niebuhr's] notion of personal being,"[32] and therefore he has no need to discuss the question of messianic self-consciousness with its dubious historical basis.

Moreover, in his Christology Niebuhr has combined historical exegesis and theological interpretation, grounding the latter in the former. He is able to affirm the unity of Jesus Christ with the Father on the basis of his concrete historical acts and teachings, rather than by virtue of some ineffable psychological union "behind" the acts and teachings.

> The teaching and the acts of Jesus Christ, his moral virtues, are themselves the direct clue to his being. In them one may find, by an historical and at the same time theological exegesis, in faith, hope and love, the unique moral Sonship to God of one who is completely at one with men.[33]

Christology is grounded in actual historicity, the internal historical account of Jesus of Nazareth, which is not a falsification of the actual person but is a perspectival interpretation of the objective reality.

Jesus Christ as the Incarnation of Radical Faith

The second category or symbolic form Niebuhr uses to describe Jesus Christ is that of radical monotheistic faith. Niebuhr defines incarnation in this context as "the concrete expression in a total human life of radical trust in the One and of universal loyalty to the realm of being."[34] Radical faith is present in ancient Greece as a movement of thought and in Israel as an element in the total life of the community, but it is in Jesus Christ that it receives its fullest historical manifestation.

> Jesus Christ represents the incarnation of radical faith to an even greater extent than Israel. The greatness of his confidence in the Lord of heaven and earth as fatherly in goodness toward all creatures, the consistency of his loyalty to the realm of being, seem unqualified by distrust or by competing loyalty. The faith is expressed in acts of healing as well as in teaching, in his interpretation of the historic moment in which he lives and in the leadership he seeks to give to his people, in his relations to national enemies and to the morally rejected.[35]

Niebuhr finds the nature and degree of Jesus' faith to be such that only phrases like "son of God" and "incarnation" are adequate to express the manner in which he represents God to men and directs men to God.

> His confidence and his fidelity are those of a son of God -- the most descriptive term which Christians apply to him as they contemplate the faith of their Lord. The word of God as God's oath of fidelity became flesh in him in this sense that he was a man who single-

> mindedly accepted the assurance that the Lord of heaven and earth was wholly faithful to him and to all creatures, and who in response gave whole-hearted loyalty to the realm of being.[36]

This understanding of Jesus is predicated on the same exegesis of his personal qualities which Niebuhr had given in Christ and Culture, where as we have seen the primary characteristic of Jesus is his utter devotion to God. Radical faith is that complete confidence in God and loyalty to his purposes that leads to the qualities of love, hope, obedience and humility that Niebuhr had noted in the earlier work.

Defined formally, radical monotheistic faith is a form of human faith which affirms that Being is God, which is to say that "the principle of being, the source of all things and the power by which they exist, is good, as good for them and good to them."[37] It is confidence and trust in what otherwise is regarded with distrust and suspicion; it is the affirmation of will and purpose in what otherwise is seen as chance and fate and capriciousness. It is the trust that both being (and hence the Creator) and goodness (the Redeemer) are one, or as Niebuhr can also put it, that the principle of being is also the principle of value.[38]

Somewhat less abstractly, radical faith relies on nothing less than the source of all being for the worth of the self and of all that exists. "It is the assurance that because I am, I am valued, and because you are, you are beloved, and because whatever is has being, therefore it is worthy of love."[39] It is the confidence that whatever is, is good, because all things are grounded in the One beyond the many who is gracious.

Radical faith is not only characterized by universal trust and confidence, but also by universal loyalty. It is loyalty to all that is and to each existent in particular because of their relationship to Being. Thus the structure of faith, as Niebuhr again reminds us, is triadic.[40] Radical monotheism can be distinguished from every henotheistic form of faith on the basis of the universality of its loyalties.

> Love of the neighbor is required in every morality formed by a faith; but in polytheistic faith the neighbor is defined as the one who is near me in my interest group, when he is near me in that passing association. In henotheistic social faith my neighbor is my fellow in the closed society. Hence in both instances the counterpart of the law of neighbor-love is the requirement to hate the enemy. But in radical monotheism my neighbor is my companion in being; though he is my enemy in some less than universal context the requirement is to love him. To give to everyone his due is required in every context; but what is due him depends on the relation in which he is known to stand.[41]

If radical monotheism can be defined positively as universal trust and loyalty, it can also be clarified by noting what it is not. It is the refusal to give total allegiance to any human values, laws, or society, as Jesus had refused to absolutize the Jewish religious laws or the Roman civil laws or any single ethical principle such as love or nonviolence.[42] It repudiates all attempts to absolutize some relative and finite object, "sacred" or "secular" although of course it draws no such distinction. It is more inclusive than either of the other two general forms of human faith, polytheism, "man's natural religion," or henotheism, the worship of one finite, social god above others. It may be contrasted with such henotheistic faiths as nationalism, scientism, historicistic utopianism, naturalism and humanism, all of which stop short of universal loyalty and are therefore less than radical forms of closed-society faith. Even institutional religious worship and Christomonistic theology and piety must be rejected as henotheistic idolatries.[43] Radical monotheism, of which Jesus Christ is the fullest embodiment, dethrones all absolutes that are less than God.

> At the same time it reverences every relative existent. Its two great mottoes are: "I am the Lord thy God; thou shalt have no other gods before me" and "Whatever is, is good."[44]

Jesus Christ as the Paradigm of Responsibility

The ethical expression of radical monotheistic faith is universal responsibility. "The radical faith becomes incarnate insofar as every reaction to every event becomes a response in loyalty and confidence to the One who is present in all such events."[45] When used by Niebuhr with respect to the person of Jesus Christ the symbolic form of responsibility is extremely illuminating. Niebuhr notes, first, that like the other images which have been used to interpret his person, the symbol of responsibility involves a dual affirmation of a Chalcedonian nature. In Jesus Christ man is directed toward God and God is directed toward man.[46] With respect to the former, he is the responsible man who interprets all action upon him as the action of God and responds accordingly in utter trust and faithfulness. But he also transforms man's innate suspicion of God into trust. Thus, ethically, he does what only man can do in his responsible acts before God, and he does what only God can do by effecting a profound change in man's fundamental orientation toward God.

We must explore these concepts more fully, the first here and the second under the rubric of the doctrine of the work of Jesus Christ.

As the paradigm of responsibility, Jesus Christ

> is the responsible man who in all his responses to alteractions did what fitted into the divine action. He interpreted every alteraction that he encountered as a sign of the action of God, of the universal, omnificent One, whom he called Father. He responded to all action upon him as one who anticipated the divine answer to his answers.[47]

This interpretation of God's action is that of the radical monotheistic faith in which all things that happen in the world of man and nature are understood as the will of God, though not in a fatalistic or mechanistic sense. The action of the Universal One is understood by the symbolic form of responsibility as "more like that of the great wise leader who uses even the meannesses of his subjects to promote the general welfare."[48] What some men regard as signs of the operation of arbitrary and capricious power in nature, Jesus interprets as signs of cosmic graciousness and generosity. He finds goodness and righteousness at the heart of the universe, but its workings do not follow the provincial and self-centered conceptions of man's standards of goodness and righteousness. Jesus "understands and reacts to natural events as expressive of an omnificent intention that is wholly affirmative of what it brings into being."[49] He also responds to human beings and actions as having a meaning derived from the divine will, "which hates nothing that it has made but wills it to be and to be whole."[50]

The divine action and rule which Jesus finds in all mundane acts are now only partly visible and manifest. What is now hidden will become clear; the rule of God (not the end of history or the perfect society) which is only partly evident now is coming in fullness imminently. Again, Niebuhr finds Jesus' eschatology to be subsumed under his radical faith in God's sovereignty. "Realized eschatology is realized theology."[51] Niebuhr summarizes his understanding of the person of Jesus Christ according to the symbol of responsibility as follows:

> He interprets all actions upon him as signs of the divine action of creation, government, and salvation and so responds to them as to respond to divine action. He does that act which fits into the divine action and looks forward to the infinite response to his response.[52]

No act or event lies outside the sphere of the Divine Providence, and no being is unrelated to His cause. Jesus is responsible to God, but he is responsible for other creatures in God's realm since it is through his relations with other finite beings that he both discerns the ways of God and expresses his faith in God. Because his faith is in the One in and beyond the many, he does not conceive of his responsibility in terms of closed society ethics but in universal terms. He refuses to absolutize any relative or finite object, for God alone is God. "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."

The conception of the person of Jesus Christ that emerges from Niebuhr's three-fold symbolization is that of a man wholly directed in radical trust and confidence to God, who because of that was utterly loyal and loving to the whole realm of being which is God's cause and domain and universally responsible in all his actions because of his trust in God. The importance of the person of Jesus Christ is not intrinsic, but is the importance of one who reveals the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth as gracious Redeemer and Friend. Not only in his life and teachings, but supremely in his death, Jesus reveals the graciousness of the Divine sovereignty. The cross "is the final, convincing demonstration of the fact that the order of the universe is . . . an order of graciousness wherein, as Jesus had observed, the sun is made to shine on evil and on good and the rain to descend on the just and the unjust."[53] The cross is consistent with the whole of Jesus' life, for it is the climactic act of a life lived in absolute trust and faithfulness to God and in the confidence that God is faithful to his creatures. Niebuhr's Christology is theocentric.

The Work of Jesus Christ: Revelation, Reconciliation, Transformation

In the last chapter we noted that revelation is both transforming power and symbolic perspective. The image of the person of Jesus Christ offers us a total perspective through which to understand ourselves and to make sense of events in our personal and corporate lives. But the person is also the basis of the work, for it is in the person of Jesus Christ that God is active as transforming power. Although we may speak of the work of Jesus Christ as revelation, reconciliation and transformation, these are but distinguishable aspects of one movement. Niebuhr does not, in other words, view these as a chronological progression as though God first revealed Himself, then reconciled man to Himself and then began the process of conversion. Rather these are three reciprocally related parts of one continuous whole.

Whatever other events may be the source of revelation for other communities, the event of Jesus Christ is the focus of God's revelation to the Christian community. Jesus Christ mediates the divine self to us and evokes our acknowledgement of God as trustworthy.

> The God who reveals himself in Jesus Christ is now trusted and known as the contemporary God, revealing himself in every event; but we do not understand how we could trace his working in these happenings if he did not make himself known to us through the memory of Jesus Christ; nor do we know how we should be able to interpret all the words we read as words of God save by the aid of this Rosetta stone.[54]

Jesus Christ is the revelation of God in that, as we have seen, he points beyond himself to the Father. The extraordinary thing about Jesus Christ was his complete trust in God and his unswerving loyalty to God's cause. Hence he invites us to trust God and to be faithful to His cause. Because of the power of the image of this figure to evoke faith, Christians have sometimes substituted faith in Jesus Christ for faith in God, a problem which Niebuhr frequently and severely criticizes as a form of henotheism.[55] However, when Jesus Christ is understood as one who radically redirects our confidence and loyalty from himself and all finite relative objects to the One whom he calls Father, this perversion of Christian faith is more easily avoided.

> We recognize that if we want to be loyal to Jesus Christ we are required to be loyal to something more than Jesus Christ, namely to the cause to which he was loyal; . . . that we are required to trust not only in the goodness of Jesus Christ but that we are required to trust in the Lord of heaven and earth.[56]

Jesus Christ is the "Great Neighbor"[57] in the triad of faith who points beyond himself. Men trust in him as the one who faithfully represents God but if they rely on the image of God which Jesus Christ presents to them, they are inescapably directed to the One True God. Jesus Christ demonstrates God's faithfulness and trustworthiness; revelation as a faith-eliciting event is the revelation of God.

Apart from revelation man perceives himself to be living in an inimical world without meaning or purpose. Man lives in profound distrust of being; he lives with "the idea that what is strong in the world is something which is against us . . . He believes that there is a God, but that he is against us, . . . that the ruler of the world is not good."[58] Apart from revelation ultimate Being is perceived as the void, or impersonal fate, or the enemy of man's causes and the opponent of his gods, the power that slays him but not the power that redeems. Thus,

> The problem of man is how to love the One on whom he is completely, absolutely dependent; who is the Mystery behind the mystery of human existence in the fatefulness of its selfhood. . . . It is the problem of reconciliation to the One from whom death proceeds as well as life, . . . who appears as God of wrath as well as God of love.[59]

Through Jesus Christ the radical sovereignty of God is revealed as the sovereignty of One who can be trusted, One who intends good for man and all creation. Jesus Christ reveals that the One in and beyond the many is not indifferent or inimical to man but that He is man's Friend and Companion. Revelation means that God makes himself known as First Person, as dependable Thou. "The principle of Being is the First Person . . . who is faithful as only selves are faithful."[60] The acknowledgement of God as loving, loyal Person means that we need no longer live in fear and distrust of the Power of the universe, for that Power is neither indifferent void nor impersonal fate; it is the one whom Jesus calls Father. Through the event of Jesus Christ we are reconciled to God by the demonstration of His faithfulness to one who relied on Him. We can now know the ultimate power as trustworthy and faithful.

> Now a strange thing has happened in our history and in our personal life; our faith has been attached to that great void, to that enemy of all our causes, to that opponent of all our gods. The strange thing has happened that we have been enabled to say of this reality, this last power in which we live and move and have our being, "Though it slay us yet will we trust it." We have been allowed to attach our confidence to it, and put our reliance in it which is the one reality beyond all the many, which is the last power, the infinite source of all particular beings as well as their end. And insofar as our faith, our reliance for meaning and worth, has been attached to this source and enemy of all our gods, we have been enabled to call this reality God.[61]

Precisely how this reconciliation occurs it is not altogether possible to explicate; it is "the great surd."[62] The absurdity is not in the metaphysical claim of incarnation but in the existential fact that faith in God is elicited by an event in which one who was utterly trusting and faithful should be betrayed and crucified and resurrected. It is in the resurrection that we have the image of the Divine as trustworthy and life-giving. Apart from that event, "not manifest to us in physical signs but in his continuing Lordship,"[63] we would remain suspicious of the Almighty. The resurrection "demonstrates" God's faithfulness and trustworthiness, but the resurrection is not and cannot be, as we have seen, an event in external history; it is an event in internal history. The absurdity that faith in the graciousness of God is elicited by the shameful death of the man who trusted Him utterly is itself the meaning and evidence of the resurrection.

> This is a greater surd: that the man who reasoned otherwise, who counted on the faithfulness of God in keeping all the promises given to life, and who was loyal to all to whom he trusted God to be loyal, should come to his shameful end, like all the rest of us; and that, in consequence of this, faith in the God of his faith should be called forth in us.[64]

Niebuhr could not say more than this about the way in which the atonement was accomplished, and he was dissatisfied with the traditional theories because of the questionable images of the nature of God and the relationship of God and man which they involved. But he was never more eloquent than in his description of the effects of the atonement.

> Reconciliation to God is reconciliation to life itself; love to the Creator is love of being, rejoicing in existence, in its source, totality and particularity. Love to God . . . is loyalty to the idea of God when the actuality of God is mystery; it is the affirmation of a universe and the devoted will to maintain a universal community at whatever cost to the self. . . . Love to God is the conviction that there is faithfulness at the heart of things.[65]

Despite its ultimate inexplicability, man's reconciliation to God is inseparable from Jesus Christ through whom our natural distrust is transformed into trust. Reconciliation to God means the transformation of our fundamental relationship to Him and therefore our relationships to all finite acts and beings. Revelation issues in the conversion of the whole self toward its true humanity.

> As revelation so considered means the event in which t the ultimate unity is disclosed as personal or faithful, so the human response to such revelation is the development of integrated selfhood.[66]

The self previously fragmented and without an adequate center now affirms the goodness of all being and its responsibility to all the many by virtue of its trust in the One and its faithfulness to His whole realm of being. Salvation means that we are delivered from that deep distrust of the One which is manifest in fear and distrust of the many. It means that we are freed to interpret "all that happens to us and to which we react as occurring in a final context of life-giving rather than death-dealing, as occurring in a universal teleology of resurrection rather than a universal teleology of entombment."[67]

Niebuhr's understanding of the reciprocity between all aspects of the self means that the conversion of the self also includes the transformation of our ideas of God and of the moral life. For instance, we now understand God's unity no longer as the oneness of unconditioned being beyond the many, the unity of static order. Rather we understand God's unity as that of the One who unites the world by acting in and through all things, the union of Creator, Redeemer and Living Active Presence.[68]

Through revelation we also experience a revolution in our conception of divine power from arbitrary, impersonal force to the power that is manifest in weakness and the sovereignty that is exercised "more through crosses than through thrones."[69] His is the power of goodness, for deity must be both powerful and good, the source of value as well as of being, if it is to be truly God. However, the goodness manifested in Jesus Christ is not goodness-in-itself but the goodness of self-emptying love, a goodness that reserves nothing for itself. With respect to each of these conceptions of God we enter the moment of revelation with the demand that God be one, powerful, and good in a certain way only to have our expectations revolutionized and fulfilled in another way.

Similarly, revelation effects the conversion of our conception of the moral law. The first change is in the nature of the moral imperative. Prior to revelation the moral law appears as autonomy, "what we demand of ourselves in order that we may become what we ought to be."[70] We can escape from this by asking why we ought to be anything other than we are. However, in revelation the moral law takes the form of theonomy, the demand of One from whom there is no escape and no exceptions. So, in Jesus Christ we have no new law but the revelation of the eternal law-giver in his righteousness and sovereignty. The moral law is also transformed by revelation from the ethic of a closed society to a universal ethic and in this process it is necessarily intensified. No boundaries can be drawn to restrict the extent of its application; the limited scope of a closed society is seen as an idolatrous corruption of moral values. Finally, revelation converts the moral law from an imperative to an indicative, from the law of love to a love that is freely given.

> The moral consequences of this faith is that it makes relative all those values which polytheism makes absolute, and so puts an end to the strife of the gods. But it does not relativize them as self-love does. A new sacredness attaches to the relative goods. Whatever is, is now known to be good . . . The moral consequences of faith in God is the universal love of all being in him.[71]

Revelation involves us in a permanent revolution of the mind and heart, a continuous conversion of our whole way of thinking and doing and being.

Eschatology and Conversionism

Two important considerations that emerge from Niebuhr's conversionism require some further elucidation. The first is the eschatological dimension. Niebuhr maintains that the perfection of radical monotheistic faith, the completeness of our trust in God, and the total conversion of our ideas are experienced now more as potentiality than as actuality, more as promise than as fulfilment. Conversionism as an ongoing process implies an eschatology that is both realized and futuristic; it is an eschatology that emphasizes the emergent reality of redemption.

> What is to become clear in the end, however, is not something new. It is now an emergency that is coming. The actuality of the present is to become emergent. God whose rule is hidden and whose rule will become manifest is ruling now, despite all hiddenness. Realized eschatology is realized theology.[72]

The present reality of God is seen in his present act of transforming the lives of individuals and the world from distrust and limited responsibility to trust and universal responsibility. But although it is really occurring, it is not a fait accompli, nor will it ever be within history as we know it. Man continually lapses into distrust and betrayal, into idolatry and fear, yet the eschatological is a real and present hope in human existence.[73]

The other consideration which Niebuhr's conversionism raises is his affirmation in some sense of natural religion. Niebuhr holds that man has some knowledge of God's existence and power prior to and apart from His revelation in Jesus Christ.[74] For example, man's primitive sense that life is worth living seems to issue in a recognition of an ultimate being who gives purpose and meaning to human existence. This "natural" knowledge of God is conceptualized in the philosophical and social history of Western man.

> Though they cannot therefore be regarded as non-historical and simply rational, our ideas of the goodness, omnipotence and eternity of deity represent the demand of our Western, Hellenized, human reason and come to us in social memories which are not connected with the name of and life of Christ.[75]

Man's natural knowledge, however, is inadequate because it is partial and distorted. It results in the inadequate and evil images of henotheistic and polytheistic faiths which fall short of integrated selfhood and universal human community. Revelation is therefore necessary to complete and reconstruct our natural knowledge of God.

However, apart from some natural knowledge of God there would be no way of recognizing the God of revelation as God, no "point of contact" between the realm of nature and the realm of grace. Moreover, apart from natural knowledge we would be caught in the dilemma that either revelation would be the communication of truths about God or it would be content-less, a purely immediate personal relationship with God. Niebuhr rejects both of these, maintaining that revelation is communicable, that is, that it has a noetic dimension. However, revelation is not itself the communication of new truths; instead it results in a "radical reconstruction of our natural knowledge about deity."[76] Niebuhr's conversionism enables him to affirm the personal character of revelation without sacrificing the cognitive element. Of course this is possible because of the unity of the self, the

the reciprocity that exists between all the functions of the self. So it is that radical monotheism can be glimpsed in human religious and political and scientific communities although in a distorted and partial way, for radical faith is the transformation of natural faith. "Revelation is not the development and not the elimination of our natural religion; it is the revolution of the religious life."[77]

Revelation, then, means the radical conversion of our fundamental relationship to God from distrust and unfaithfulness to trust in Him and loyalty to his cause, the whole realm of being, made possible by the historical image-event of a man whose utter trust and loyalty in Him was not betrayed. As that event interpreted and internalized from the personal standpoint evokes faith in us, so it also results in a transformation of our conceptions about deity and the moral life, such reinterpretations being conformed to the image of the person of Jesus Christ. This radical reorientation of our existence and reattachment of our fundamental faith also means the integration of our selves by means of an adequate center of value from which to enter into the whole nexus of relationships which constitutes our lives.

The Church

The work of Jesus Christ is made effectual in and through the historic community of persons called the Church. The Church is both the community of those being reconciled to God and converted to His will and it is the reconciling, transforming agency of God's historic redeeming action. In keeping with this dual understanding, Niebuhr defines the Church in terms of six polarities between which it continually moves or in which it participates.

First, the Church is "the subjective pole of the objective rule of God."[78] This is to suggest that the Church is distinct from the realm and rule of God, and it is "not the only human community directed toward the divine reality."[79] It is, however, the community where the kingdom of God is apprehended and where God is known as God. Specifically, the Church is the community related to God through Jesus Christ which means that it has a particular perspective toward the Divine, the Trinitarian knowledge of God as creating, redeeming, reconciling activity and presence. To point to the relation yet distinction of the Church and God's rule is to indicate the eschatological nature of the Church. For the rule of God is an emergent reality, hidden but really present. The Church "is the society which is at the very edge of coming into existence, more real than all the communities which are passing away; but it is not to be seen."[80]

Secondly, the Church is both a community and an institution; it has both a common mind and an embodiment that gives it form and social expression. It must move constantly between these two poles lest as institution the Church corrupts as well as preserves the Church as community, or as the latter it stultifies the former. Third, the Church is characterized by both unity and plurality; it is one yet it is also many. It moves toward unity, but its unity must have room for diverse expressions.[81] Fourth, it is local and universal; without localization, the universal Church does not exist, but as local Church only it is not the Church of God in Jesus Christ. Fifth, the Church is both protestant and catholic. It includes "the principle of protest against every tendency to confuse the symbol with what it symbolizes and the subject with the object,"[82] the finite with the Infinite. But its protest has no meaning apart from that against which it protests, and "unless the Infinite is represented in finite form, unless the Word becomes flesh over and over again, though only as oral preaching, . . . there is no human relation to the Infinite and Transcendent."[83]

The final polarity is that of Church and world, where world is understood as the community in which God is not acknowledged as God. "The Church lives and defines itself in action vis-a-vis the world."[84] The Church is the companion of the world with which it is related sometimes as partner, sometimes as antagonist, always as the community to which the Church is responsible before God to give account of "what it has seen and heard in divine revelation."[85]

A further aspect of the dialectic between Church and world is seen in the importance of the Church to be both independent of the world and yet to be in continual communication and often cooperation with it. Niebuhr exemplified this polarity in his own career in that in his early writings, at a time when he felt that the Church had become so closely identified with the world that it was no longer able to speak prophetically to the world, he called for the emancipation of the Church from the world. In particular he felt that the American Church had become too closely identified with capitalism, nationalism and humanism, and in words reminiscent of Luther's essay on "the Babylonian captivity of the Church," Niebuhr denounced the bondage of the Church to these faiths of modern civilization.[86] However, later in his career, he felt that the pendulum had swung so far in the direction of the Church's separation from the world that the Church once again was failing in its mission. Thus he called for the reformation of the Church "not now by separation from the world but by a new entrance into it without conformity to it."[87] The Church is a member of the triad that includes both God and the world, and it must always be faithful to God and responsible to his cause, of which the world is a part. Thus the Church is responsible to God for "the conservation, reformation, redemption and transfiguration of whatever creatures its action touches."[88]

The purpose and responsibility of the Church is "the increase among men of the love of God and neighbor."[89] In other words, it is the task of proclaiming and representing the good news of the transforming and reconciling work of Jesus Christ. The Church carries out this task through its three-fold responsibility as apostle, pastor and pioneer.[90] As an apostolic community, the Church's mission is to proclaim the good news both to individuals and to man in his corporate life, but it cannot preach the reconciling word without also speaking the word of God's judgment upon human sin and idolatry. As pastor, the Church is especially concerned with the victims of man's lack of love and justice, and again its responsibility is both personal and social. As pioneer the Church has the responsibility to represent God to man by embodying in its life the divine mercy and compassion, the divine love that includes all men. For "God does not exist as God-for-us or become known or loved as God except in his and our relation to the neighbor."[91] In this way the Church represents a kind of extension of the incarnation, albeit in imperfect form, as it embodies God's love to man and man's responsibility before God to be fully man.

The constant danger for the Church as Niebuhr saw it was the human temptation to idolatry and particularly the idolatry of ecclesiasticism, the exaltation of the Church or of Christianity. The result is that the purpose of the Church becomes no longer the reconciliation of men with God but the conversion of men to a henotheistic religion. A similar threat to the mission of the Church is "the substitution of Christology for theology, of the love of Jesus Christ for the love of God and of life in the community of Jesus Christ for life in the divine commonwealth."[92] Thus the Church is in constant need of reconciliation and conversion itself; it is simul justus et peccator. It is ever in need of being called and re-called to its purpose of love of God and devotion to His cause, the whole realm which He loves, to which He is faithful, and which He seeks to reconcile to Himself through the instrumentality of the Church of Jesus Christ.

The Validity of Jesus Christ

We must ask one final question of Niebuhr's Christology in the light of the problem of history. By refusing to exempt the revelatory event from historical relativism, can Niebuhr maintain that Jesus Christ is in any way decisive for the God-man relationship? In what way can a relative historical event be normative for faith? This question of course is a re-phrasing of Lessing's problem of how accidental historical truths can be the basis for the timeless truths of reason, and it was a crucial question for Niebuhr at least as early as the time of his doctoral dissertation.[93]

On the one hand, Niebuhr's answer respects the limits laid down by his confessionalism, for he leaves open the question of whether non-Christians may find God by another route than Jesus Christ.

> I do not have the evidence which allows me to say that the miracle of faith in God is worked only by Jesus Christ and that it is never given to men outside the sphere of his working, though I may say that where I note its presence I posit the presence also of something like Jesus Christ.[94]

Niebuhr consistently refuses to maintain a Christomonistic exclusivism that insists that God is revealed only in Jesus Christ.[95]

On the other hand, precisely because of our limited perspective as persons who are dependent on the mediation of a particular historical tradition for the framework of our understanding, Jesus Christ is normative for Christendom. The symbols and images clustered around the person of Jesus Christ have so informed and permeated Christendom's understanding of the divine-human relationship that there seems to be no real alternative for Western Gentile man; Jesus Christ is our fate. Niebuhr affirmed this as early as 1929 and reaffirmed it in the posthumously published The Responsible Self.

> There is a fateful and an obligatory element present in the very point of view which an individual or a society occupies not by choice but by fate. One who is born into a Christian society must needs share something of the Christian point of view. In a very real sense of the term "Christ is his fate."[96]

> The category of fate, as Karl Heim called it, comes to my attention in the fact that I have no way of beginning religiously outside of my history, in abstraction from my society. Jesus Christ is my fate in Heim's words, whether I accept or reject him. . . . There is no other way of being a religious self as such, any more than there is a way of being a thinking or a feeling or a speaking self as such. I am fated to be these things in the thus-ness and so-ness of my given historicity.[97]

The category of historical fate functions for Niebuhr as a kind of historicist equivalent for the traditional doctrine of election. Fatefulness does not imply resignation as much as it suggests a graciousness that is at work, for if there is a certain limitation implicit in this fateful element, there is also a positive affirmation.

> The viewpoint which is imposed upon [one] by his birth at this point of history and under these particular conditions is not only a limitation but also an opportunity for discovery, not only a confinement to a relative insight but also an obligation to make the best of his insight.[98]

> I call myself a Christian . . . because . . . my thinking about life, myself, my human companions and our destiny has been so modified by [Christ's] presence in our history that I cannot get away from his influence; and also because I do not want to get away from it. . . . I call myself a Christian more because I have both accepted this fateful fact and because I identify myself with what I understand to be the cause of Jesus Christ, . . . the reconciliation of man to God.[99]

We are fated not only to the limitations of the Christian point of view; more importantly, we are enabled by our fate to be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.

Niebuhr refuses to limit God's revelation to Jesus Christ, but he also maintains that Jesus Christ is the decisive revelation of God for the Christian West because it is that event which has thoroughly qualified our historical religious experience. The dichotomy between eternal truths of reason and accidental truths of history loses its force in an historical world which understands that eternal truth is available to historical beings only in relative historical forms. To affirm this is not, as we have seen, to risk skepticism, agnosticism or subjectivism since we are dealing with an objective relativism that recognizes both the limits of its perspective and the reality of the truth which it perceives from that limited standpoint. We do not have the absolute perspective to enable us to claim that Jesus Christ is universally valid, but we can affirm that he is normative for us.

Niebuhr's understanding of the historically fateful validity of Jesus Christ brings together the major strands of his historical thinking and so serves as a fitting conclusion to the body of this essay. For it recognizes the limitations of the claims that can be made about human knowing in the light of the historically relative character of all our understanding, while emphasizing the reality of the relative truth we do perceive within the standpoint we occupy. In this way it recalls the confessional nature of theology in its dual aspect of both refraining from making universal claims and yet confessing to the truth that we are given within our tradition. We are also reminded that the perspective we occupy is the personal standpoint of internal history, particularly the standpoint of the Christian community which has been granted its relative insight through the historical event of Jesus Christ. Finally, Niebuhr's view of the validity of Jesus Christ points to his Christocentrism that affirms the decisiveness of Jesus Christ for Christendom without making exclusive claims that neither historical consciousness nor the free sovereignty of God can support.

NOTES

[1] Frei, p. 106.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 114.

[3] *CC*, p. 12.

[4] The term is from Harvey, *Historian and Believer*, p. 267.

[5] *CC*, p. 12.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

[7] The following discussion is based on Harvey, *Historian and Believer*, pp. 266-67.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 266.

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 267.

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] This comparison is suggested by Reinhold Niebuhr, who uses it to contrast the difference between myth and fact. See "The Truth in Myths," *The Nature of Religious Experience*, ed. J. S. Bixler *et al.* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1937), p. 130.

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Norm of the Church," *The Journal of Religious Thought*, IV, 1 (Autumn-Winter, 1946-47), p. 11. Cf. also *CC*, pp. 245-46.

[15] *CC*, pp. 14-15.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 14.

[17] *Ibid.*

[18] *Ibid.*

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 16. The quotation is italicized in the original.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

[21] *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 19.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

[24] Ibid., p. 22.

[25] Ibid., p. 24.

[26] Ibid., p. 27.

[27] Ibid., p. 28.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid., p. 29.

[31] Cf. Frei, pp. 114-15.

[32] Ibid., p. 115.

[33] Ibid.

[34] [illegible]0.

[35] [illegible] p. 42.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid., p. 38.

[38] Cf. especially Ibid., p. 32.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Cf. Ibid., pp. 33f. and Niebuhr, "The Triad of Faith," pp. 9f.

[41] RMWC, p. 34.

[42] Here again see Niebuhr's treatment in CC, pp. 12-29.

[43] See RMWC, pp. 49-89, where Niebuhr discusses these faiths and defends radical monotheism by way of contrasting it with henotheistic faiths and noting those elements within henotheisms which point to radical faith.

[44] Ibid., p. 37.

[45] Ibid., p. 48.

[46] RS, p. 163.

[47] Ibid., p. 164.

[48] Ibid., p. 165. Cf. also Ibid., p. 173, where Niebuhr uses the symbol of responsibility to reinterpret the nature of the divine sovereignty in dynamic relational terms, avoiding a deterministic framework.

[49] Ibid., p. 166.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid., p. 167. Italics added.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Niebuhr, "War as Crucifixion," p. 514.

[54] MR, p. 154.

[55] In MR, Niebuhr terms this Christolatry "rationally and morally inadequate" (p. 149) and shows how it inevitably leads to ecclesiolatry. In RCI, he refers to it as "a new unitarianism of the second person of the Trinity" (p. 250), and he seems to have Barthianism primarily in mind. In RMWC, the practice is condemned as a substitution of a henotheistic faith for radical monotheism (pp. 59-60).

[56] Niebuhr, "Triad," p. 10.

[57] Ibid., p. 3.

[58] H. Richard Niebuhr, The Gospel for a Time of Fears, Three Mimeographed Lectures given at the School of Religion, Howard University (Washington: Henderson Services, 1950), p. 20.

[59] PCM, pp. 36-37.

[60] RMWC, pp. 44-45.

[61] Ibid., pp. 122-123.

[62] CC, p. 254.

[63] RS, p. 177.

[64] CC, p. 254.

[65] PCM, p. 37.

[66] RMWC, p. 47.

[67] RS, p. 143.

[68] We are dealing here and in the following paragraph in very brief form with Niebuhr's Trinitarian views. For a somewhat fuller treatment of this doctrine, see the concluding chapter, infra, pp. 264-67.

[69] MR, p. 187.

[70] Ibid., p. 165.

[71] *RMWC*, p. 126.

[72] *RS*, p. 167.

[73] See H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Churches and the Body of Christ*, William Penn Lecture, 1953 (Philadelphia: The Young Friends Movement of the Philadelphia Yearly Meetings, 1953), pp. 19-21, for a good discussion of the dual nature of eschatology.

[74] The affirmation of our natural knowledge of God is an understanding made from within the revelatory situation about what seems from that perspective to be true of all men. It is not, however, the basis for a natural theology, since it is knowledge that results from revelation.

[75] *MR*, pp. 181-82.

[76] *Ibid.*, p. 182.

[77] *Ibid.*, p. 190.

[78] *PCM*, p. 19.

[79] *Ibid.*, p. 20.

[80] H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Hidden Church and the Churches in Sight," *Religion in Life*, XV, 1 (Winter, 1945-46), p. 114. This article is an excellent discussion of the nature of the Church as emergent reality as a society in process of conversion.

[81] Throughout his career, Niebuhr was concerned with the unity of the Church. His first book of course explored the "social sources" of disunity and concluded with some suggestions regarding "ways to unity." (*SSD*, pp. 264-84) Most of his articles dealing with the Church referred to in this section discuss the problem of unity in some form and nearly all offer theological insight into both the nature of the existing unity of the Church and potential resources for greater unity. Cf.also H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Unity of the Church," *Theology Today*, III, 3 (October, 1946), pp. 371-84.

[82] *PCM*, p. 25.

[83] *Ibid*. Cf. also H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Gift of the Catholic Vision," *Theology Today*, IV, 4 (January, 1948), especially pp. 514ff., where Niebuhr stresses the objective nature of the catholic viewpoint as over against and complementing the subjective emphasis of protestantism.

[84] *PCM*, p. 26.

[85] *Ibid.*, p.

[86] Cf. especially H. Richard Niebuhr, with Francis Miller and Wilhelm Pauck, *The Church Against the World* (Chicago: Willet, Clark and Co., 1935), pp. 123-156. This essay also appears in abridged form as "Toward the Emancipation of the Church," *Christendom*, I (1935-36), pp. 133-45.

[87] *RCI*, p. 250.

[88] H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Responsibility of the Church for Society," *The Gospel, the Church and the World*, ed. K. S. Latourette (New York: Harper & Bros., 1946), p. 120. In this excellent article Niebuhr discusses the nature of the Church's responsibility to "God-in-Christ" (the eternal in the temporal) and to "Christ-in-God" (the redemptive principle in the absolute). He also speaks of the Church's irresponsibility in terms of both worldliness and isolation from the world.

[89] *PCM*, p. 31.

[90] See Niebuhr, "The Responsibility of the Church for Society," pp. 126-132, for Niebuhr's treatment of these three roles of the Church.

[91] *PCM*, p. 34.

[92] *Ibid*., p. 44.

[93] See Niebuhr's treatment of Troeltsch's view of the problem of the validity of Christianity, "Ernst Troeltsch's Philosophy of Religion," pp. 219-263, especially pp. 258-263.

[94] *RCI*, p. 249.

[95] It is relevant here to note a favorite axiom of Niebuhr's which he had learned from F. D. Maurice who in turn had learned it from J. S. Mill. The principle is "that men [are] generally right in what they affirmed and wrong in what they denied." (*CC*, p. 238 and elsewhere.)

[96] H. Richard Niebuhr, *Moral Relativism and the Christian Ethic*, Address given at a Conference of Theological Seminaries meeting at Drew Theological Seminary, Madison, N.J., Nov. 29-Dec. 1, 1929 (New York: International Missionary Council, 1929), pp. 9-10.

[97] *RS*, p. 112.

[98] Niebuhr, "Moral Relativism . . ," p. 10.

[99] *RS*, p. 43.

CONCLUSION

CHAPTER VII

RADICAL MONOTHEISM AND HISTORY

In Part I we noted that the modern consciousness of history as it developed from Vico, the Romantics and Hegel in particular represented a reorientation of man's conceptual framework. The locus of man's search for truth shifted from the unchanging cosmos to the ever-changing arena of history with the result that the nature and mode of knowing that had been accepted by the greater part of the Western tradition were called into question. No longer could man claim to have access by virtue of a timeless reason to eternal immutable truths; reason was now understood as historical reason, and its insights were seen to be relative to the socio-historical standpoint it occupied. The relativizing of knowledge posed the problem of skepticism and subjectivism; that is, if all our knowing is relative to its historical time and place, do we have any valid knowledge of reality at all? For theology in particular, relativism raised the question of how a relative historical event can be decisive for human existence. More than any other theologian up to his time, Ernst Troeltsch faced this difficult question squarely, concluding that Christianity could be normative only for the Western culture which had been thoroughly formed by the Christian perspective. Troeltsch denied that Christianity possessed any uniqueness that allowed it to be exempt from the principles that governed ordinary historical movements and truth-claims. At the same time, however, his thinking was predicated on a monistic ontology derived from German idealism in which he understood all historical developments to be "relative and partial expressions of the Absolute which ever hovers before all of history without itself becoming historical."[1]

H. Richard Niebuhr maintains that neither skepticism nor subjectivism is a corollary of relativism. If man has only a relative perspective on reality, it does not follow that what he sees from that perspective is not real, though his perception will necessarily be limited and partial. The acceptance of historical relativism requires a change in our understanding of the nature of the truth that is available to man, but it does not involve a denial that man has any access to objective reality. The relativistic understanding that man's insights are a function of the perspective he occupies led Niebuhr to several important methodological conclusions and might well be said to be the fulcrum of his theological method. On the one hand, it provides the basis for his two-aspect theory of history through which he maintains the validity of the personal perspective on events; on the other, it led to his confessionalism and his recognition of the limitations of the validity of Christian faith to those who share the same historical standpoint. Niebuhr's confessionalism meant that he eschewed the apologetic claim of the superiority of Christianity and of the universal validity of Jesus Christ as the exclusive norm for man's relationship with God, at the same time maintaining the decisiveness of Jesus Christ for those whose historical perspective is that of the Christian

West. Niebuhr makes these affirmations within the context of a theology of revelation, rather than a metaphysical monism. This means that he is able to safeguard the distinction between Creator and creature and to insist on the sovereignty of God through the divine priority in revelation. A theology of revelation maintains that God is active in human history though not in such a way as to require his identity with the historical process.

Thus we have suggested that Niebuhr's thought is grounded in a relational ontology in which God and man are understood as distinct though in continual interaction. The fact that we can never fully abstract one party from the network of relationships that constitutes the divine-human situation means that God is known only within the context of his historical relationship with man. That is, man's knowledge of God is inseparable from his knowledge of history. This is also to suggest that our knowledge of God is not knowledge of God in his aseity but of God in relation to man and of man in relation to God, but that is not to equate God and man. It is rather a relational objectivism that maintains that God is objective to man but man's apprehension of Him is the reflexive knowledge of a Person. This is closely related to Niebuhr's "religious relativism" that insists that we know God only as He is God-for-us. Not only history but faith is the presupposition of the divine-human encounter, so we may speak of the context of confessional theology as the historic faith.

In affirming the "faith-method" of theology, Niebuhr aligned himself with the tradition of Schleiermacher and much of the nineteenth century. However, Niebuhr broke with the empirical tradition at the point of its subjectivism and its anthropocentrism. Specifically, he found its identification of faith with inner experience to be too restrictive; it tended to identify God with the immanent Spirit, minimizing His creative work in nature and His redeeming work in history.[2] Methodologically, the difficulty with Schleiermacher's understanding of faith, adopted more or less uncritically by his successors, lay in the fact that it tended to split the subjective (faith) apart from the objective (the historical event and community). This separation occurred with the advent of historical criticism in the age after Schleiermacher, and it led to several related problems, the first of which we have discussed in terms of the question of the historical mediation of the essentially subjective experience of faith. A second problem had to do with the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, his unity with the Father, and a third problem was the separation of the Jesus of history from the Christ of faith, of the person from the work. The crux of these problems lay in the fact that the idealist tradition conceived of personality in the psychological terms of self-consciousness.[3] Thus faith was understood as the inner feeling of absolute dependence, and the uniqueness of Jesus Christ was the perfection of this inner God-consciousness. However, when historical criticism questioned the messianic consciousness of Jesus, it tended to undercut the grounds for affirming the divine-human unity. This in turn reinforced the dichotomy already emerging for other reasons between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith or between the person and the work of Jesus Christ.

Niebuhr is able to shift the framework of the entire discussion by both his understanding of faith and his realistic conception of personality. By defining faith in terms of interpersonal trust and loyalty and by his emphasis on the relational character of human existence, Niebuhr understands faith as involving a triadic structure in which trust and loyalty to God is also expressed in acts of faithfulness to men. Thus the divine-human unity of Jesus Christ was not based on an inner psychological matter, but a dynamic personal relationship in which his relationship to God is that of man wholly devoted to the Father and his relationship to men is that of the God of agape. Further, Niebuhr holds a realistic conception of personality in which the inner person is expressed in outer acts, so that Jesus' faith is communicated by his words and acts culminating in the cross. Similarly, the faith of others is elicited by the trust and faithfulness which Jesus expresses. Faith is both expressed and evoked in a triadic structure involving self, others, including Jesus Christ, and God; it is not possible to abstract from the network of triadic interactions. Faith is mediated historically inasmuch as throughout history faith is evoked in selves as a result of their experience in a community which by both word and deed re-presents the Great Neighbor Jesus Christ.

> Faith is a dual bond of loyalty and trust that is woven around the members of such a community. It does not issue from a subject simply; it is called

> forth as trust by acts of loyalty on the part of others; it is infused as loyalty to a cause by others who are loyal to that cause and to me. Faith exists only in a community of selves in the presence of a transcendent cause.[4]

The result is a realistic relational view of faith as occurring in the context of an historic community; God reveals Himself in and through history, particularly in the history in which radical faith appears.

Moreover, since it is the nature of the person of Jesus Christ to point beyond himself to the God whom he trusts utterly, Niebuhr does not separate the person from the work. The work of Jesus Christ is to elicit faith in God, but since it is the nature of the person to point beyond himself to God, the person and the work are inseparable. The ultimate object of Christian faith is not Jesus or even Jesus' faith; rather it is God to whom he directs man's faith.

However, to speak of the historical event of Jesus Christ and to refer to God revealing Himself in history is to raise the question of the nature of history and historical apprehension and the relationship of faith's history to that of the historian. In Chapter II we suggested a rough typology of four ways in which theology before Niebuhr had attempted to define the history with which it is concerned and to deal with the dilemmas posed by historical method. The "idealist" position accepted scientific historiography as normative and regarded the person of Jesus as unknowable. It then adopted the unhistorical view that the idea for which Jesus was the historical occasion is present, and it does not matter whether that idea was embodied in an actual event.

Ritschl rejected scientific history as normative while maintaining its value as an aid in understanding the content of faith and at the same time insisting on the validity of a Christian perspectivism in establishing the nature of Jesus' life. Ritschl's dialectic between historical and theological exegesis resulted in a picture of Jesus devoid of the historically less reliable elements; but it also failed to do justice to Chalcedonian Christology. The value of Ritschl's formal understanding of the relation between faith and history was largely lost as a result of such other elements in his theology as his anthropocentric emphasis on the ethical perfection of man as a spiritual being with a concomitant emphasis on the immanent Christ and neglect of a sense of the mystery and transcendence of God.

Kaehler, as we have seen, carried Ritschl's perspectivism one step further by maintaining that the "real" historical Jesus Christ is the Biblical Christ who is known in his historic effects. But by rejecting any relationship between the Christ of faith and historical critical work, Kaehler in effect provides no grounds for the historical person of Jesus Christ and his failure to distinguish the actual figure from his effects blurs the distinction between reality and myth or dogma. However, he made quite emphatically the point that faith cannot be dependent on historical-critical inquiry since faith is trust in God and not assent to a factual proposition, a point crucial to the dialectical theologians.

We have also criticized Barth and Bultmann for the sharpness of their respective distinctions between ordinary history or Historie and revelation history or Geschichte. The result is a split between the historical figure of Jesus and the Christ of faith, between the actual person and the effects of his life. For Barth the real history with which Christian faith is concerned is the meta-history of God. Barth's distinction between Historie and Geschichte tends to be a distinction between God and man, between the historical and the meta-historical, with the result that revelation is not seen as a genuine historical event, but as a point in time when the eternal Word becomes flesh, when the suprahistorical is interjected into the ordinary historical process. The result is that it is questionable whether Barth can realistically speak of the historicity of the person of Jesus Christ at all and whether human history plays a genuine role in the encounter of God and man.

For Bultmann Geschichte refers to the present moment of existential encounter with the kerygma, which is cut off from an event of the past by Bultmann's negative evaluation of ordinary history. Historie and Geschichte seem to refer to cognitive and personal modes of understanding, respectively, but instead of seeing the two as distinct but related, Bultmann separates them sharply. The result is that the dimension of historical actuality is lost, the person of Jesus separated from the work, and revelation is devoid of content.

The basic problem with much of continental theology's treatment of the relationship between faith and history seems to be the assumption that revelation could not mean both God and history. There are perhaps several reasons for this. On the one hand, history was understood after the model of the natural sciences to refer to a past that was "dead" and to which man in the present could only be related in terms of objective knowledge. Such an understanding (Historie) meant that the actual event of Jesus Christ could be of no significance for present faith, that in no sense could God be spoken of in conjunction with such an event, and the truth which such history offered was merely accidental and propositional. Such a view of history is implicit if not explicit in Barth and Bultmann, despite some indications in the latter especially of awareness of another understanding.[5] On the other hand, both men affirmed a radical distinction between God and man which seemed also to suggest that the Divine and human history were incompatible. Perhaps the influence of Kierkegaard as well as of historical science was determinative of these two conceptions. Kierkegaard had polarized "history" and "eternity," man and God, to the extreme in order to intensify the paradoxical character of faith. At the same time, he stressed the deity of Jesus Christ while depreciating the importance of history in opposition to Hegel. These factors together led to a polarization of faith and history.

Niebuhr again simply rejects the basic framework of the discussion. Ontologically, God and history are not incompatible; the Creator is present in and in communication with His creation. This does not alter the "infinite qualitative difference" between God and man, for it is God who is Creator and it is God who takes the initiative in revelation and redemption. Epistemologically, Niebuhr's conception of history is more realistic and empirical. His distinction between internal and external history does not involve either a depreciation of past historical actuality or a special meta-historical sense of history. Internal history is based on a personal valuation which is familiar in other historical perceptions than that of the event of Jesus Christ, but because it represents a perspective on actual events, it never loses sight of the events themselves. Moreover, Niebuhr's thoroughly historical conception of human existence led him to see that past events are present in the form of customs, ideas and images that shape our present ways of thinking; the past is not a dead past but a meaningful dimension of the present. Thus, he has provided a methodological basis for the unity of the person and work of Jesus Christ and for an understanding of how a real event in the past can have a transforming effect in the present through the power of its images to evoke a total reorientation of the self and its perspective. Finally, he understands the nature of knowledge in an historically relative world and is willing to accept the limitations that understanding implies. The result is a "radical historical confessionalism"[6] that is able to take the modern historical consciousness seriously without compromising the integrity of Christian faith. Indeed, Niebuhr uses his understanding of the relative nature of human historical existence to intensify his emphasis on the sovereignty of God, which radically relativizes all finite objects of trust and devotion.

Conversionism and History

Perhaps the real clue to Niebuhr's understanding of faith and history and the point that distinguishes him from his continental predecessors and contemporaries is his conversionism. As a conversionist, Niebuhr maintains that the natural and historical world are in the process of being transformed by God's presence and action. This implies a positive assessment of man's natural being and of his historical life. It means that radical faith is not a de novo creation but a transformation of man's natural faith through historical experience. Ordinary historical life is not something to be repudiated or shattered by revelation; it is to be transformed and revolutionized. Of the five types of relationship between "Christ and culture" that Niebuhr distinguishes, only the conversionist position takes the reality, goodness and freedom of history seriously without absolutizing the relativities of history. It is only from this vantage point of a positive assessment of history and God's relationship to it that the problem of faith and history can be resolved without violating the integrity of one or the other. This can be made clearer by contrasting the five types.

The "Christ against culture" view calls into question the goodness and reality of history. History is a fundamentally alien reality; God is not really concerned with history but with rescuing his children from the terror of history. The acts of God in history form a Heilsgeschichte that is utterly distinct from and opposed to ordinary history; God's acts really occur on a different ontological plane. Here redemption and atonement overpower creation. History as such is not redeemed or redeemable; the result is a dualism of the kind which Niebuhr emphatically rejected.

The view that regards the relationship of Christ and culture as in fundamental agreement takes history seriously but naively. In the "Christ of culture" motif, Christ is thoroughly historicized, while man or history is absolutized. Creation is emphasized but God is so identified with His creation that history loses a transcendent reference by which it can be judged and therefore loses its possibility of redemption.

The "Christ above culture" posture also runs the risk of absolutizing some relative historical truth. For while asserting both the transcendence of Christ over culture and the immanence of Christ in culture, this position tends to identify the transcendent with a particular historical expression. Again the result is an overemphasis on creation and not sufficient stress on the redemptive principle.

The dualistic "Christ and culture in paradox" position tends to separate sacred and profane history; the former is redeemable while the latter is not. The result is a failure to allow for the goodness and redemption of all of history, thus limiting the sovereignty and graciousness of God while depreciating the natural and historical world.

Only the "Christ transforming culture" view understands history as a whole as the arena of God's gracious redeeming activity and yet gives history neither too much nor too little value. The conversionist takes the sinful character of history seriously as a corruption of a good creation. But the fault is in man and is not intrinsic in the created order, which is good and whose goodness is still evident in the fallen condition. Thus the conversionist maintains that redemption is not the abolition of man's "natural" and historical being, but the transformation of it. The conversionist sees continuity as well as discontinuity between nature and grace, creation and redemption. He insists that the God of creation and the God of redemption are one and that redemption and creation are not essentially distinct movements; redemption is the completion of creation. Moreover, the conversionist rejects dualism and maintains that God is sovereign over all of history, and His transforming work is all-inclusive.

Thus the conversionist maintains the essential goodness and unity of history as against the dualistic tendencies of both the Christ against culture and the Christ and culture in paradox positions, but it does not absolutize a relative human historical expression as the accommodationist and synthesist tend to do. For Niebuhr it is not "faith" that transcends culture, but God.[7] Moreover, because the very nature of conversionism is an ongoing matter, a "permanent revolution," conversionism means that what happens in history is decisive; conversion itself is an historical process in which the emphasis is on the present possibility of renewal. Conversionism emphasizes the actuality of God's sovereignty.

The positive evaluation of human faith and history is the basis for Niebuhr's methodological treatment of the problem of faith and history. For Niebuhr history "is fundamentally not a course of merely human events but always a dramatic interaction between God and men. . . . History is the story of God's mighty deeds and of man's responses to them."[8] _Finitum capax infiniti_.

> For me, as for all nominalists, the inner world is suspect and God must be objective before he can be subjective. . . . I cannot begin, as religious subjectivism does, with the Fourth Gospel, but must start with the Synoptics and with a Jesus who finds God's action not within himself but in objective, natural and historical events.[9]

This affirmation is closely related to Niebuhr's emphasis on creation, not in opposition to redemption but in complementation of it. The importance of redemption is not allowed to replace the conviction that the world has never been without God's ordering action. These considerations lead us into a discussion of Niebuhr's trinitarianism. However, first, we must simply note that in the last several pages we have been attempting to suggest the relationship between Niebuhr's conversionism and the methodological problem with which this essay has dealt. Our discussion has led us back to Niebuhr's ontology set forth earlier. But both his conversionism and his ontology reflect and emphasize the central motif of his theology, the sovereignty of God. In the final analysis, it is Niebuhr's consistent and uncompromising vision of the radical sovereignty of God that is basic to his treatment of the problem of faith and history. For Niebuhr to affirm the sovereignty of God is to affirm His sovereignty over nature and history; it is to affirm His real presence in fallen institutions, and fallen men, in less than radical forms of faith, and in events that seem ugly and evil as well as in Jesus of Nazareth. But because God is "the structure in things"[10] and not alien to human historical life, Niebuhr does not have to treat Jesus Christ as so utterly discontinuous with the rest of history that he can only be apprehended in a unique way that applies to no other event. In one sense we might say that for Niebuhr Jesus Christ is not qualitatively different from other persons and events, for God is present in all events if we but look with the eyes of faith. Yet Jesus Christ is unique if only because in him the glass through which we see darkly is not quite so dark.

Niebuhr's Trinitarianism

Consistent with his understanding of the object of theology as God and man in relation, Niebuhr does not treat the traditional Christian doctrine of the Trinity in terms of God's aseity, but in terms of His relations with men. In the important article, "The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Unity of the Church,"[11] Niebuhr suggests that the problem of God for man can be seen in terms of the threefold question of whether the all-powerful Creator is good, whether redemptive goodness is powerful, and "whether among all the spirits there is a Holy Spirit."[12] When the doctrine of the Trinity is stated in this way, it is evident that it becomes an existential rather than a speculative question, and it is also evident that it is not for Niebuhr primarily a separate category for theology but is in fact the whole of theological reflection. It can therefore serve to summarize his thought for us.

First and last, Niebuhr's thought is theocentric rather than Christocentric, despite the importance of Christ in his theology. This is seen in his understanding that man cannot live without a cause, a value-center which renders life meaningful. All men live by faith in some god, but man's natural faiths are finally inadequate to give unity and purpose to his life. In their distorted ways, they point beyond themselves to the One in and beyond the many in whose presence life is always lived, whether man acknowledges it or not. In his natural faith, however, man's relationship to that One is characterized by distrust and suspicion. God is known as the Enemy of our relative causes, the Destroyer of all that we depend upon and consider worthwhile. He is known as Power, but the problem is whether He is also gracious, whether He can be trusted. Is the Universe friendly to man or do we live in an inimical or indifferent world? This is the irreducible question for man's existence; its answer is decisive for all else in his life.

Here we have Niebuhr's emphasis on God as Creator and with it the understanding that God is known through nature including human nature and reason. As he noted in the article mentioned above, historically Christian theology has had difficulty achieving a genuine trinitarian expression. It has been characterized by three "Unitarianisms." The first, the Unitarianism of the Creator, emphasizes God as maker of heaven and earth with a corresponding interest in natural theology. He finds, however, that this expression cannot stand alone; it necessarily makes affirmations of God's goodness that cannot be derived from nature or reason but must depend on His revelation in Jesus Christ. So Niebuhr had found that his own reflection on the Creator led to the question of historic revelation in which the God of power is seen also to be the gracious redeeming God.

In Jesus Christ God is revealed as trustworthy Friend, whose power is manifest not only in Creation but in self-giving love. Here God's power is seen not as brute strength but as the power of weakness, not as a force that overpowers but as a love that overcomes. Here God is known as Redeemer as well as Creator and as manifest in history as well as in nature, in human as well as in natural life. Niebuhr criticized the "Unitarianism of the Son" which he found in Ritschl, for example, for its repudiation of nature and emphasis on man's need to rise above nature. The difficulty with Christomonism is that it fails to point to the Creator as the power behind the Redeemer, and thus fails to link goodness and power, posing the question of whether redemption can be effective at all. For Niebuhr faith in Jesus Christ means faith in the One whom he trusted and to whom he points.

Finally, the reconciliation of man and God is both an existential matter and an ongoing process; that is, it is made effectual through God's continuing presence and activity in the world. Trust in the Being known through nature as powerful and revealed by the historic event of Jesus Christ to be good, involves a transformation of the inner life that is possible only through the inner presence of the redeeming power of God. The Spirit is present in internal history mediating an event in the past to present experience.[13] The religion of inner experience is powerless unless the Spirit is the Spirit of God the Creator, and it is indistinguishable from other inner experience apart from reference to the historic revelation of the Son; the Spirit "proceeds from the Father and the Son." The presence of the Spirit is a presence in men in the community of faith, hope and love that is the context in which human trust in God is expressed and elicited and in which the permanent revolution of our values and ideas is occurring. It is through the activity of the Spirit of God the Father and the Son that men are called away from their relative faiths to a transformed life of radical trust in the Absolutely Good and universal responsibility to His created order.

Niebuhr and the Current Theological Situation

In a number of ways Niebuhr's theology is particularly suggestive with respect to some of the concerns of the contemporary theological scene. We shall do no more than mention some of these inasmuch as a fuller explication would unnecessarily prolong this essay.

The current discussion of the problem of faith and history might profit a great deal from reading Niebuhr. Insofar as one element of that discussion is neo-Bultmannian, it seems to be condemned to an overly sharp distinction between the noetic and the existential resulting in an inability to grasp the reciprocity of the objective and subjective spheres of human life. Thus the "New Quest" for example attempted to base its understanding of the person of Jesus on an historical reconstruction of Jesus' self-consciousness, an attempt that failed because it was based on a misunderstanding of the nature of historical apprehension. Of the "neo-Bultmannians" only Van Harvey has a realistic view of history and he is influenced as much by Niebuhr as by Bultmann if not more. At the other extreme, the Pannenberg school with its neo-Hegelian approach maintains that all of history is self-evidently the history of God's revelation. They seem to have failed to face squarely the epistemological question of how we know that history is revelatory and the theological problems involved in the equation of historical fact with revelation. The result is a dogmatism that seems hard to reconcile with either historical relativism or with Christian faith. Niebuhr seems to be much more honest and convincing methodologically without sacrificing any of the value that inheres in the Pannenberg position.

One of the characteristics of Protestant theology today seems to be its interest in dialogue. This interest extends to conversations with Roman Catholic theologians, interfaith discussions, and dialogue with adherents of "secular faiths" such as Marxism. Perhaps because he was himself a conscious participant in dialogue with both Christian and secular thinkers, Niebuhr's thought lends itself to this aspect of contemporary theology. His insistence on the inclusion of both objective and subjective poles of faith, seen for instance in his emphasis on the actual historical community and on the element of personal evaluation and commitment involved in faith, would seem to speak to the present ecumenical discussion within Christianity. His appreciation of the difficulty of any one ecclesiastical or theological expression to incorporate the fullness of Christian experience, with respect to the Trinity for example, and his suggestion that the Church in its wholeness needs all the different expressions would also seem to contribute an important insight to that discussion. His conception of radical monotheism seems to be broad enough to include many Jewish and less than orthodox Christian believers within its fold, perhaps providing a theological basis for interfaith as well as ecumenical theological discussion.

Similarly, in an age of religious pluralism with its attempt to appreciate the importance of other views without compromising the integrity of individual faiths, Niebuhr's confessionalism offers a perspective for religious tolerance and open discussion. As Daniel Day Williams has recently suggested:

> The claim to an exclusive knowledge of God . . . seems irrelevant to the meeting of men in present society as they wrestle with their problems. Sociologically, the "death of God" is closely related to the death of this kind of parochialism.[14]

Niebuhr's conversionist openness to the positive values of culture and particularly his view that henotheistic faiths contain suggestions of radical faith implies the possibility and importance of genuine conversation with other forms of faith.

Niebuhr's thought lends itself particularly to two recent theological developments, the theology of hope and process theology. The emphasis on hope, inspired to some extent by the Christian-Marxist dialogue, represents a motif which he emphasized in his conversionist understanding of the present activity of God in transforming human life. His emphasis on the eschatological as an emergent reality is consistent with this theological movement.[15]

Williams has also suggested that "theology is distinguished today almost universally by the search for a genuinely social conception of man, of God, and of reality."[16] If our understanding of Niebuhr is correct, we have seen in his thought what seems to this writer to be such a conception. It is a relational view that could be elaborated somewhat by metaphysical analysis, perhaps particularly in conjunction with the process metaphysics of Whitehead.[17] Process philosophy stresses "becoming," taking seriously the notions of time and historical development. It is not dualistic but rejects the conception of God as dwelling in timeless perfection entirely apart from the world and unaffected by what happens in human history. Moreover, it involves an ontology of God and man in genuine relationship that would seem to fit in well with Niebuhr's thinking.

Most important for the contemporary scene, however, is Niebuhr's understanding of faith in God as the fundamental attitude of trust and confidence in Being and loyalty to the universal community of beings. It is surely only such an affirmation that in the final analysis can make sense of human existence and provide adequate meaning and purpose and integration of human life. In the midst of the present theological and cultural confusion and disintegration, the "death of God," secularity and secularism, the challenge of humanisms of the right and of the left, surely a Christian theology that is true to its historic faith will center its message on what Niebuhr called radical monotheism. Niebuhr's enduring contribution consists in the power with which he affirms the absolute sovereign graciousness and trustworthiness of God apprehended in and through the relativities of human historical experience.

NOTES

[1] Ogletree, p. 224.

[2] See H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Unity of the Church," *Theology Today*, Vol. III, No. 3 (October, 1946), pp. 377-78, where Niebuhr speaks of this tradition in terms of a "unitarianism of the Spirit."

[illegible] See Frei, p. 112, for this useful suggestion.

[4] *CC*, p. 253.

[5] Cf. especially Rudolf Bultmann, *Eschatology and History*, (New York: Harper & Bros., 1957), pp. 110-37.

[6] Harvey, *Historian and Believer*, p. 288, uses this phrase to describe his own position but it applies to Niebuhr quite as well.

[7] See Julian Hartt, "Theology of Culture," *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. VI, No. 3 (March, 1953), p. 507. Hartt notes three other contemporary positions, those held by Maritain, Tillich, and Reinhold Niebuhr, all of whom find some reference from which to measure culture which in fact becomes a point above culture and therefore an absolutization of a relative cultural perspective. Only H. Richard Niebuhr does not absolutize some such relative position.

[8] *CC*, pp. 194-95.

[9] Niebuhr, "Is God in the War?," p. 954.

[10] Niebuhr, "A Communication: . . ," p. 447.

[11] Niebuhr, "The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Unity of the Church," p. 372.

[12] *Ibid*.

[13] Cf. Frei, p. 100, n. 100, where the suggestion is made that in *MR*, the concept of internal history *is* Niebuhr's doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

[14] Daniel D. Williams, "The New Theological Situation," *Theology Today*, Vol. XXIV, No. 4 (January, 1968), p. 449.

[15] It is interesting to note that in a little book that appeared in 1953, D. W. Soper categorized Niebuhr's theology as "the theology of hope." (D. W. Soper, *Major Voices in American Theology* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953]. The chapter on Niebuhr is pages 153-190.

[16] Williams, "The New Theological Situation," pp. 445-46.

[17] The possibility of a rapproachment between Niebuhr's thought and process philosophy is also suggested by Irish, pp. 275-76, and by Bernard H. Loomer, "Neo-Naturalism and Neo-Orthodoxy," The Journal of Religion, Vol. XXVIII, No. 2 (April, 1948), pp. 89-91. Loomer suggests eight characteristics of process philosophy and finds the Niebuhr of MR compatible with several of these.

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